

# GEORGE WILLIAM MACARTHUR REYNOLDS

## FAUST.

### PROLOGUE.

It was the commencement of August, 1493.

The advance of rosy-fingered Morn had dispelled the clouds of darkness from the bosom of the Elbe, and the rays of the rising sun were reflected from the gilded pinnacles of the Castle-Church of Wittenberg.

On one side of the ancient town, from the banks of the river to the verge of a vast forest of pines, the luxuriant harvests waved their golden heads: on the other side the rich pasture-lands were covered with the flocks and herds of the Lord of Rosenthal.

But while the sun dawned on the fair scene, and the town, the University, the Castle, and the feudal mansion of Rosenthal, which stood on an adjacent hill, awoke to the light and bustle of a new day, it was still dark in the subterranean dungeons of the prison of Wittenberg.

Of all the wretched inmates of those drear abodes, none kept his eyes fixed upon the grated window of his solitary cell with more anxious longing than a youth in the unassuming garb of a student.

Seated on the straw in the corner of his lonely dungeon, he eagerly watched for the first beam that might deign to visit him.

For six long months had he pined in solitude in that cell—the deepest and darkest in the prison of Wittenberg.

Time had passed; but with the hours and days that dragged themselves along with such leaden feet, each fondly-cherished hope had departed from the student's breast.

Even his imagination—once so glowing and so enthusiastic in its visions—had at length failed to conjure up those phantoms which might make him believe that deliverance was near.

Yes—for six months had he lingered in that dungeon, anxiously awaiting the hour which should enable him to justify himself before the criminal tribunal.

Six months had passed away in mingled hope and bitterness of heart; and he had prayed and wept, and wept and prayed by turns—how vainly!

Then he had shut his eyes, even in the midnight darkness of the dungeon, as if he could thus draw a veil over his maddening thoughts.

But still those thoughts haunted him in a thousand ghastly and appalling shapes, till he became afraid of the obscurity of his cell—hence his ardent longing for the presence of the sun.

What was that youth's crime?

He had loved—and still loved—a noble lady—dearly, madly loved her.

O Theresa! thine image seemed to smile at times amidst the gloom of his imprisonment, as the star from the midst of the thunder-clouds cheers the ocean-tossed mariner.

Yes—thou he loved as fervently and well as ever man could love; and thy young heart beat with reciprocal tenderness for him.

But he was poor—a humble student; and Theresa was the only daughter and the heiress of the Lord of Rosenthal.

It was a crime in the haughty Baron's eyes for one so low as the young student to aspire to the love of a maiden of such high degree; and by the influence of the vindic-

tive father, the youth was thrown, on certain fictitious charges, into the prison of Wittenberg.

Such an atrocity was easily perpetrated in those times, when feudal power was predominant; and the same influence which had effected it had hitherto succeeded in delaying judicial investigation.

Thus the once noble and generous heart of that young man had been tutored by adversity and persecution to entertain and cherish sentiments of deadly vengeance against the powerful lord who had been the cause of his sufferings. These sufferings were so intense that oft-times had he exclaimed, "Oh! that some power, celestial or infernal, would listen to my supplicating voice, and aid me in my misery! Fain would I give all hopes in this life for one hour of Theresa's love, and all my chances of heaven for one short minute of revenge!"

And these words he now repeated, for the thousandth time, as he sat upon his straw, watching for the appearance of the light.

Suddenly the bolts of his dungeon-door were drawn back, the heavy chain outside fell with a clanking din upon the stone floor, and the turnkey entered, bearing a lamp.

That light fell upon the handsome but care-worn features of the youth, whose chestnut hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion denoted him to be a true son of Saxon birth.

"What do you require of me?" exclaimed the student, starting from his straw pallet, and drawing up his noble and well-knit form to its full height. "It is not the hour for my poor provender to be renewed; that duty you fulfil at night; and now, methinks, morning must be about to dawn. But, ah! perhaps you come to tell me that I am free," added the youth, his tone assuming a hasty expression of joy—"to announce to me the order for my liberation? Speak—is it so?"

And he clasped his hands together.

"Faust," returned the man, "in such a place as this one must be nerved to hear sad rather than happy tidings. It is for to-day!"

"To-day—my liberty!" ejaculated the young man, his pale countenance becoming flushed with a glow of animation.

"'Tis not your liberty which I have to announce," said the turnkey; "but in an hour you must prepare to render an account of all your misdeeds to the Tribunal. Morning has already dawned, and by the time its beams can reach this cell, the officers will come to fetch you to the Judgment-Hall."

"This announcement is most welcome," said the young student. "Know you not that you bring me certain hopes of my release? I shall refute with ease the foul aspersions which have been thrown upon me, and freedom then must follow."

"Think not so, poor youth," returned the gaoler; "buoy not yourself up with hopes which must experience bitter disappointment. Of what crime do you imagine yourself to be accused?"

"The calumnies of the Lord of Rosenthal have implied that I sought to carry off his daughter and force her into marriage," answered the youth; "but my love for her was of too pure, too holy, and too disinterested a nature to permit me even to contemplate such a deed of perfidy and violence."

"And know you not that from her birth the Lady Theresa has been betrothed to the Archduke Leopold, the nephew of his Imperial Majesty, Maximilian the First?" demanded the turnkey, significantly.

"I know it well," replied Faust, with a mournful air. "But Theresa and I met—and loved; and her generous heart preferred the humble student whom she saw and knew, to the mighty prince whom she never saw and never knew."

"Then hast thou confessed thine own crime, Faust?" said the turnkey.

"How crime?" ejaculated the student. "Is it a crime to love in obedience to Nature's dictates—those promptings which haughty men cannot control?"

"It is a crime to look with the eyes of love upon a maiden betrothed to one of the imperial blood," answered the turnkey; "and the penalty of that crime is death."

"Death!" cried the unhappy youth, suddenly aroused to a full sense of his danger. "But this is horrible! It cannot be! You dream—you rave! Human injustice does not fly to such extremes."

"It is enough that one so great and powerful as the Baron of Rosenthal should be your enemy. You were doomed to die the day you entered here."

"But how know you so well the intent of the Tribunal—you who are only a subordinate, and to whom the judge would never reveal the foul iniquity of this proceeding?" demanded Faust.

"I have passed through the ordeal," answered the turnkey; "indeed, I am a prisoner now, for I was but too happy to purchase my life upon the one condition that I should pass the remnant of my sad existence in the condition of a gaoler."

"What was your crime?" demanded Faust.

"Of that no matter. My sentence was death upon the wheel."

"And could nothing save you, except the condition which you have named?"

"Nothing could save me. But, stay!" ejaculated the man, after a pause; "I had forgotten! Yes—there was one dread alternative more hideous still, and to that I nearly yielded. But my good genius interposed to save me—and I would rather linger out my life in this degraded, wretched occupation, than purchase legal power and countless wealth by means of that alternative."

"Was it, then, so very terrible?" asked Faust, shuddering—he knew not why.

"Nay—urge me not to speak more," said the man, apparently recoiling with ineffable horror from the subject, as if it were something monstrously, hideously palpable.

"Good turnkey, give me further explanation!" cried Faust. "Thou hast pricked my curiosity in a most sensitive point."

"But I will not gratify it," said the turnkey, glancing around with affrighted looks: "for this—this is the very cell!"

"Nay—refuse me not this boon!" exclaimed Faust. "See! here is my purse—it contains all my wealth. I give it to thee; thou may'st find a use for it—I shall have none, perhaps," he added, mournfully.

"Thanks for the gold," said the turnkey, greedily clutching the purse: "it is an argument which hushes all my scruples. Listen, then. An old tradition, but little known beyond these walls, declares that on a time, a century and a half ago, a learned man, whose days and nights were spent in deep researches after the hidden mysteries of science, became a prisoner in this self-same dungeon. He was well versed in cabalistic lore, and knew the power of incantations over demons. He was condemned to death on the wheel; but by his detestable art he escaped that punishment. For, by a certain spell, he raised up a demon from the depths of hell, and to him he sold himself, body and soul, for liberty, riches, power, and long life. The incantation which he used remains deep-graven upon this wall. Tradition says that his own hand wrote it there, and that all mortal attempts to efface it are vain and useless. Such was the alternative to which I ere now alluded, and which is within the reach of him who may choose to consummate so horrible a sacrifice!"

With these words, the turnkey, shuddering from head to foot, held the lamp towards that portion of the wall which overhung the student's bed, and exclaimed—

"Holy Virgin protect us!—yes, the inscription is there still!"

Faust turned his eyes eagerly towards it.

"Nay—read it not!" cried the gaoler, in alarm, "else would the demon yield obedience to the spell, and stand before us here, clothed in all his terrors."

At the same time the man retreated a few steps, so that the glare of his lamp no longer fell upon the inscription.

"I must now leave you, Faust," he said. "Prepare yourself—in a short half-hour the officers will be here."

The turnkey left the cell, taking the lamp with him.

Faust was again plunged in total darkness.

"Yes," he exclaimed aloud, when he was once more alone, "that man did well to shun so fearful an alternative. May God give me equal courage to resist the temptation! Oh, Theresa," he continued, wildly, after a moment's pause, "dear Theresa, thou knowest that I would dare all for thee! Alas! how changed have all my sentiments become within the last half-hour! Oh, that I had never heard that fearful tale, which rings like a tocsin in my ears, and seems to find an echo in my heart! I feel rebellious thoughts rising within me. They teach me to aspire to those dread heights where I might haply linger for a time, but whence it would be my destiny to fall into the pit of hell's eternal fires! Oh, Theresa! to clasp thee in my arms—to hear thy silver tones sound in my ears—to catch the sweet glances of thy melting eyes, and to watch the throbbing of thy gentle breast—oh, this—this indeed were paradise! And then," he continued, his voice changing from a plaintive tone to one of extreme bitterness, "and then to wreak my vengeance upon that proud baron and the unjust judge, who have condemned me ere my trial—to wreak that vengeance which will be second in sweetness only to Theresa's love, but which even that love may not avert, although one of the victims be her father. Oh, this were also paradise! Yes, Theresa, for love of thee I would renounce my hopes of heaven, and to gratify my vengeance I would not refuse to sign a compact with the powers of hell!"

At this moment the door again opened, and an officer entered the cell, bearing a light.

"Faust," he said, "I am come to lead thee into the presence of the chief judge, who in a few minutes will take his seat in the Judgment-Hall."

"One moment only!" cried Faust, a cold shudder creeping over his whole frame. "Or, stay—grant me three minutes to reflect upon my dangerous position."

"I will not refuse the request of a man who cannot have many hours to live," said the officer, in a compassionate tone.

He then placed the lamp upon the floor, and retired.

"A man who cannot have many hours to live!" repeated Faust, when he was again alone. "My fate, then, is decided on; the gaoler did not deceive me."

He paused, and reflected profoundly.

"Alone—once more alone!" he exclaimed, at the expiration of a minute. "Oh, dangerous solitude! Alone with my own thoughts—those perilous companions of an interval like this! Away, rebellious sentiments! Awaunt, unhallowed aspirations! I will not—cannot barter all my future hopes for a short period of terrestrial joy!"

The officer returned to the cell.

"The time you asked has gone, and you must follow me," he said.

"Again I pray thee—I implore thee for a moment's grace," cried the unhappy student. "Only two minutes more—two poor, short minutes, just to collect my scattered thoughts—and I shall be at thy disposal."

"I risk the anger of the chief judge," returned the officer; "and yet I cannot find it in my heart to disregard your supplication."

The officer once more left the dungeon, into which a straggling beam of the sun now found its way.

"Oh! no—no, I cannot die so young, and leave all I hold dear behind!" cried Faust, now pacing the cell in an agitated manner, while his eyes beamed with unnatural fire. "Beloved Theresa, we will meet again! I will pour forth the fervour of my passion at thy feet, and I will wreak deadly vengeance on thy sire and his corrupt judge. My fates decree it—my destiny is fixed—I must obey their mandates! Yes, yes—I will live for love and vengeance!"

With these words, he took the lamp in his hand, and advanced towards the inscription on the wall.

But even then he dared not accomplish his terrific purpose.

"No, no—better to die now than resign all hopes of salvation!" he cried, while his soul was a prey to the most agonizing emotions. "What! are the three minutes gone already? Hark—a step approaches! Now it lingers without. Perhaps that kind officer may yet accord me



another minute. Oh, I cannot dare death now—I who have scarcely seen two and twenty summers!"

A shudder crept over his frame—his brain seemed to whirl.

At length he exerted all his mental energies, and, by a desperate effort, turned his eyes upon the inscription.

"One bold, decided step," he said, "and all will be changed! Yes, I will take that step, although it lead to hell!"

Then, without another moment's hesitation, he approached the lamp close to the wall, and read, in a rapid tone, the following incantation:—

"By the suicide's grave, deserted and drear;  
By the howl of the jackal, and creaks of the bier;  
By the cold, creeping worm which preys on the dead;  
By the skull that provides the foul toad with a bed;  
By the ravens that flap their wings o'er the grave;  
By the witches' abode and the skeleton's cave;  
By the murderer's bones which bleach on the tree,  
I command thee, O Demon, appear unto me!"

The moment the last words issued from the lips of the daring student, he fell back a few paces involuntarily, the lamp dropped from his hand, and a spirit, wearing a human form, stood before him.

There was nothing terrible in the appearance of the Demon; on the contrary, his countenance wore an expression of melancholy—may, even of anguish, as if the eternal fire were gnawing at his heart.

But around him was shed a powerful light, which illuminated the whole dungeon.

"What wouldst thou with me?" he asked, in a deep, sonorous voice.

"Save me—save me from this horrible place!" cried Faust.

"I will!" answered the Demon, and he caught the student firmly by the arm.

Then, with the rapidity of lightning, they rose together through the roof of the dungeon, and Faust became insensible.

When Faust awoke, he was reclining upon the pallet at his own humble lodging, in a street close to the principal entrance of the University of Wittenberg.

He opened his eyes, and glanced fearfully around; it was broad daylight.

But when his glance fell on the wainscot of the room instead of the massive stone walls of the dungeon—when he beheld the little table, with the writing materials on it, and the shelf whereon lay a few manuscripts which he had borrowed from the library of the University for the purpose of study—his countenance became animated with an ineffable joy.

"It is a dream—a very fearful dream!" he exclaimed, sitting up on his pallet. "And I have thus been frightened at a dream! But, in good sooth, it was very terrible. Let me reflect! Methought I was cast into a noisome dungeon, and that I lingered there six months or more—hope after hope departing day by day. And then I dreamt—holy Virgin! I shudder still—that by some spell I raised a fiend, who snatched me in a moment from that horrible abode, just as the officer came in to lead me into the presence of the chief judge. But Heaven be thanked, it was a dream—an idle vision! I'll now away to Theresa, and tell her what I dreamt, and how I suffered in my dream. Dear girl! her tears will flow for me, as if I had indeed experienced all that I have fancied in my terrific vision. Yes, let me rise, and then away to Theresa!"

Faust threw himself, with a joyous smile upon his arching lips, and with a light heart, from the pallet; but no pen—no human language can describe the horror of his soul when, in the shade of the curtain which overhung the head of the humble couch, he beheld the Demon!

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed the wretched youth, staggering towards the table, whereon he leant to save himself from falling, "it is not, then, a dream?"

The Demon, with his arms folded across his breast, and with an infernal smile of scorn curling that lip which ere now was alone expressive of profound melancholy—enveloped, moreover, in a species of haze or dim mist which partially obscured his form—the Demon advanced slowly towards Faust.

"No—it is not a dream!" he said, in that deep, sonorous voice which had before made every chord in the heart of the student vibrate; "it is a reality in all its details—one, too, that involves your hopes of a hereafter state of bliss, and may make you mine. But still it is not too late! You

may renounce mine aid—you may send me hence, and take your destinies in your own hand."

"Say you it is not too late?" exclaimed Faust. "Oh! then, I will not have thine aid—I will not surrender all my hope and all my chance of future happiness. No—I will not use thy power. Thou may'st depart."

"Hear but one word," said the Demon. "If you renounce my aid and send me hence, that very moment must you return to the depths of yonder prison. Thence wilt thou be dragged to the Judgment-Hall—and from the Judgment-Hall the way is short which leads to the scaffold!"

"I will dare it all!" cried Faust. "Heaven will not desert me. My faith is fixed on a power superior to thine—to that all-seeing power I look for aid. And even Theresa yet may be my own!"

"Fond fool, you rave!" exclaimed the Demon, with an ironical laugh. "Think you that the high-born daughter of one of Germany's most powerful nobles, and who is affianced to a prince, pines for the humble student who has been absent and silent now for half a year? Think you her sire has not forged some fine tale of your indifference—some history of your fond devotion for some more favoured lady? Theresa knows not of your imprisonment—she only knows of your absence. Do you suppose, then, that she remains faithful to one whom she deems insincere? Such constancy belongs not unto mortals."

"Ah! if I thought that Theresa was unmindful of me—if I could believe that her heart had changed—that her love was now another's—I would dare all which I might have to undergo by signing a compact with thee! Yes—I would have wealth and power," continued the student, powerfully excited, "that I might triumph over my rival—even be he the Archduke Leopold himself! But I discredit thee, malignant fiend! Thou canst not prove one tittle of thy tale! No—Theresa is faithful still!"

"Why should I demonstrate my power to you?" demanded the Demon, sneeringly, "since you mistrust me thus?"

"I swear," cried Faust, "that if you can confirm all you have ere now told me concerning Theresa's faithlessness, I will be yours—body and soul—so that I might enjoy wealth, power, vengeance, and triumph, during my stay on earth."

"You swear?" demanded the Demon.

"I swear most solemnly," answered Faust.

"And you will sign a compact to the effect of what you just have said," pursued the fiend; "wealth, power, vengeance, and triumph during your stay on earth?"

"I will sign that compact," replied the student, unhesitatingly—for he was maddened to despair by all he had heard concerning his well-beloved Theresa.

"Have then thy wish!" cried the Demon; and extending the right arm towards the window, he chanted these lines—

"By the spells that you fear,  
By the charms that have power,  
Fair Theresa, appear  
As thou art at this hour!"

A dark cloud rolled slowly across the window, and as it passed away, it gradually revealed the interior of a room in the Castle of Rosenthal. There, upon a divan or sofa of Oriental fashion, Theresa was seen reclining, her long fair hair floating over her alabaster neck, her sunny blue eyes gazing attentively upon a miniature which she held in her hand.

"'Tis she! 'tis she!" ejaculated the enraptured Faust; and he would have rushed towards the vision, had not the Demon forcibly held him back. "Yes—'tis she, my own beloved Theresa. I will fly to her!"

"Poor fool, be still," said the sonorous voice of the Demon, sounding ominously in his ears. "That is thy rival's miniature! See with what ardour she hangs over it! And now she places next to her heart that portrait of him whom she loves so fondly."

"You have the power to do such wondrous things," said Faust, in a tone of profound melancholy, "that I dare not doubt you. Yes—'tis too true—Theresa is faithless! May curses light upon the love which she has given to another!"

The vision was now overshadowed by a mist, which gradually became more and more dense until it grew into a dark cloud. Then the dark cloud itself began to roll away, and in a few minutes all was as at first.

"Yes—it must be so," mused Faust, for an instant unmindful of the presence of the Demon; "I comprehend it all—it is natural! She thought herself neglected. Not a visit—not a letter from me for six long months! How

could it, then, be otherwise? My imprisonment was concealed from her, and her mind was poisoned against me! Revenge alone would prompt her to contract a union with one more assiduous than myself!"

"Faust, wilt thou be mine, now that thine eyes have seen the confirmation of all I told thee?" demanded the fiend.

"What? Be thine!—Oh, no! I did not promise!" ejaculated the student, wildly. "For what should I live since she is faithless? No—no—back to my dungeon!"

"Perjured wretch!" cried the Demon. "Has such a coward as thou the nerve to dare death upon the wheel?"

"Prove that such is the fate in store for me, and I am thine!" said Faust, his blood running cold at the idea of that terrible penalty.

"You swear once more to be mine?"

"Upon the conditions already named, I swear!" said Faust, "nor will I fall back from my oath!"

"Again thou hast thy wish!" exclaimed the Demon. And, once more extending his arm towards the window, he chanted the following incantation:—

"By the spells that all fear,  
By the charms that have power,  
Let the scaffold appear,  
With the multitude near,  
As it is at this hour!"

The dark cloud rolled once more athwart the window, and as it cleared by degrees away, it revealed to the view of the affrighted student the great square in front of the prison. That vast arena was crowded with countless multitudes, and all eyes were turned towards the scaffold which was erected in the midst, and upon whose platform was all the apparatus for the mode of execution by breaking upon the wheel.

"Enough! enough!" cried Faust, turning away horror-struck from the appalling spectacle.

"Nay—be convinced that all that preparation is for thee," said the Demon. "Look once more!"

Faust glanced again towards that appalling scene, and in the midst of the crowd he perceived the public crier.

The crier rang his bell, and exclaimed, in a loud and solemn tone, "Pray for the soul of Wilhelm Faust, who is to expiate his crimes upon the scaffold at mid-day! Pray for his soul!"

"Save me! save me!" ejaculated Faust, turning with an imploring air towards the Demon.

"I will!" replied the fiend. "Power, wealth, vengeance, triumph, and love for four-and-twenty years—and then thou shalt be mine!"

"For four-and-twenty years! No more?"

"No more," answered the fiend; "and for that period I am thy slave!"

"Power, wealth, vengeance, triumph, and love—Theresa's love! Oh, these are great boons!" cried the student, his heart beating violently with mad excitement. "Agreed! agreed!"

The Demon placed a scroll upon the table, and pointing with his finger to the bottom of it, said—"Sign!"

Rendered desperate with fear, and wild with ambition, the daring youth hesitated not a moment, but seizing a pen, affixed his name to the parchment.

The instant the dread compact was concluded, a terrific peal of thunder burst over the town of Wittenberg—the air became darkened, and a fearful storm began to rage.

"Wretch that I am!" exclaimed Faust, "what have I now done?"

The infernal chuckle of the Demon fell upon his ears, rising ominously above the appalling din of the warring elements.

Faust sank upon the floor, overwhelmed with an indescribable terror.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE CORD AND DAGGER.

THE day was verging to a close, in the middle of August, 1493, when a solitary horseman stopped at a hostel, or inn, in the little village of Kemberg.

He was a young man upon whose head scarcely three and twenty summers had shed their blessings, or as many winters their afflictions—physically and morally speaking, and, although not positively handsome, he had something both engaging and commanding about him which created interest and inspired respect. He was attired

in good, though by no means costly, apparel; yet his slashed doublet, his plain cap without a plume, and his short cloak, were worn in a manner which bespoke gentle breeding.

He was not above the middle height; but his form denoted great muscular strength, and seemed endowed with a vigour matured beyond his years. His coal-black hair fell in long curls over his lace collar, his chin was shaven close, but his small moustaches were evidently cherished with care. His large, dark eyes beamed with intelligence, and his lofty brow and arching lip were characterized by a certain *hauteur* that suited not altogether well with the modesty of his garb, yet seemed to accord with the loftiness of his bearing. He wore a long rapier attached to his plain leathern belt, and in the holsters of his saddle was a pair of pistols of the heavy and clumsy fashion of the period.

Mine host of the Black Swan hurried to assist the young stranger to alight; but the traveller, repulsing his officiousness, did not offer to move from his seat upon the fine chestnut steed which he bestrode.

"Worthy friend," he said, in a pleasing but somewhat authoritative tone, "how far do you call it from hence to Wittenberg?"

"Two leagues and better," answered the landlord, who was a fine, portly man of about fifty, "and through a bad district—uneven roads, and those of evil repute. Is it not so, Father Theodosius?"

These last words were addressed to a tall, thin, elderly monk, who, aroused from his flask of wine and chat with the landlord by the arrival of the traveller, had lounged from the parlour to the door of the tavern during the above short colloquy.

"Of evil repute, indeed!" echoed the monk, now surveying the young traveller with the most intense interest, while a smile of mingled surprise and joy played on his thin and emaciated countenance. "No one who values his life would venture through the mazes of yonder pine forest after dusk, or without an escort, however brave he might be."

"What! is the Lord of Rosenthal so neglectful of the interests of travellers," demanded the stranger, somewhat angrily, "that he permits lawless banditti to harbour in his domains?"

"Yon pine forest belongs not to the feudal possessions of his lordship of Rosenthal," answered the monk, "but to Count Manfred of Linsdorf," he added, dryly.

"What!" exclaimed the young man, "to that same Count who, as report says, alone of all the great nobles of the German Empire, appeared not at Court on the day of Maximilian's coronation?"

"The same," answered the landlord, with some embarrassment of manner, while the monk turned aside. "But it is dangerous to speak of the affairs of Count Manfred," continued mine host, sinking his voice almost to a whisper; "as dangerous as to travel through yonder forest after sunset."

The traveller appeared to hesitate for a moment; then, as if decided upon some fixed plan, he leapt from his horse, threw the bridle to the landlord, and said—

"I will not be deterred from prosecuting my journey this evening. Nevertheless, I will refresh myself with a draught of your best wine, while you procure me a couple of sturdy fellows by way of escort. See that this be done quickly, and let my horse in the meantime be well cared for."

He then entered the tavern, and called for refreshments, which were immediately served him by the landlord's better-half.

The moment the young traveller had crossed the threshold of the Black Swan, the monk accosted the landlord, who was leading the horse to the stable, and said, in an imperative tone—

"Herman, that stranger must not proceed farther this night."

"How can I prevent him, my lord?" asked the landlord.

"Let his horse go suddenly lame or fall sick, and you cannot procure him another until the morrow," replied the monk. "Moreover, you can assure him that no escort is to be had."

"It shall be done, my lord," said the landlord, with a submissive tone and manner.

"And you will place him in the Wainscot Chamber," added the monk.

"I will, my lord."

The monk then returned to the public room, and the landlord led the traveller's steed to the stable.

"Will your reverence condescend to partake of my

flask?" said the young stranger, with great urbanity of manner, when Theodosius entered the apartment. "The wine is none of the worst for a village hostel."

"It might be more indifferent," said the monk, seating himself at the table, and filling his cup. "Have you journeyed far to-day, Sir Traveller?"

"Tolerably," was the reply. "But we were speaking ere now of Count Manfred of Linsdorf. If rumour speaks truly, he is not on the best terms with his powerful neighbour, the Baron of Rosenthal."

"So says report," answered the monk, dryly.

"And I have also heard that the Count is much feared by his vassals, and leads in many respects a strange life," continued the traveller. "I believe he is a widower, and has no heir to his vast estates?"

"So says report," again replied the monk, who seemed to relish the wine better than the conversation.

"Had he not an elder brother, who died suddenly—"

"Sir Traveller," interrupted the monk, "I am a priest of God, and meddle not with the temporal affairs of men—their spiritual welfare alone concerns me. If you would obtain information relative to the dwellers in these parts, I pray you address yourself to the worthy Herman."

Scarcely were the words uttered, when the landlord entered the room.

"What news, mine host?" demanded the young traveller, turning with an ill-concealed disgust away from the morose ecclesiastic.

"Sorry news," was the landlord's reply. "My lad has just come back from his search after a brace of sturdy fellows, and without success. There's a marriage at Farmer Bertholf's, and not a man will leave it for love or money."

"Then I must proceed alone," said the traveller, coolly. "I have not much to lose, and my life can avail the lawless horde but little."

"But I had not told you all," continued the landlord. "Your horse has fallen suddenly sick."

"Perdition!" ejaculated the young stranger, starting from his seat; "are the fates then leagued to compel me to waste my time in this miserable hamlet of Kemberg? I will go with you to the stable—lead the way."

These words were uttered in an imperious tone, which made the landlord bustle about to light a lamp, for it was now dark. He then conducted the traveller to the stable, where the horse was in reality found to be in a condition which annihilated all hope of prosecuting the journey by its means.

"You gave him to drink too soon," said the traveller; "the poor animal was heated, and the water was too cold. I must make up my mind to pass the night here; and, after all," he added, in a musing tone, as he patted the horse's neck, "my time is my own."

The traveller then took from his saddle-bags a certain drug, observing—

"Fortunately, I have with me a medicament which will restore my brave steed to his usual vigour in a few hours. See that all be in readiness for my departure at daybreak."

The drug was administered to the horse, and the traveller returned to the public room in the tavern. Some food was served up to him, another flask was broached, and he endeavoured to lead the landlord into conversation upon the affairs of the Count of Linsdorf and the Baron of Rosenthal. But the monk sat there; and though he uttered not a word, but appeared to sleep beneath the cowl which he had drawn over his face, his presence seemed to act as a spell to seal the lips of the host of the Black Swan.

Annoyed at the monosyllabic answers which he received from that individual, the young stranger at length rose, and said—

"Show me to my chamber."

The landlord instantly obeyed this command. Taking a lamp in his hand, he led his guest up a flight of steps and along a corridor to the Wainscot Chamber—a large and gloomy apartment, but tolerably well-furnished for a room in a small village inn.

Placing the lamp on the old-fashioned mantelpiece, the landlord wished the traveller a good night's rest, and was about to withdraw, when the young man caught him by the arm, and said, in a tone of command—

"Who is that monk in the room below?"

"A worthy ecclesiastic, named Theodosius," was the answer; and the landlord hurried from the room, evidently fearful of further interrogatory.

The door closed behind the host, but it struck the tra-

veller that the creaking of a bolt immediately followed the shutting of the door.

He hastened to assure himself on this head. The door was indeed bolted outside!

"What can this mean?" said the traveller, to himself; and, by a natural impulse, he hastened to examine the window. "Strong iron bars!" he continued. "Surely no treachery can be meditated against me?"

Taking the lamp in his hand, he proceeded to scrutinize the room more narrowly. In a species of recess there stood a massive oak table, on which were a basin and ewer.

As his glance strayed in that direction, he perceived a panel in the wainscot of the recess suddenly glide backwards, and a naked arm was thrust from the aperture. The hand struck a dagger forcibly into the table, the arm was then withdrawn as speedily as it had appeared, and the panel glided back into its place.

All this was the work of a single moment.

The young man rushed forward, and tried to remove the panel—but in vain.

He then turned his eyes upon the dagger that stuck upright upon the table, into which it had been so violently thrust. A cord was twisted round the handle, and to that cord was fastened a slip of parchment.

The traveller tore the parchment away, and glanced his eyes in profound alarm, over the lines that were traced upon it, and which ran thus:—

"By the Dagger and Cord you are commanded to follow, without resistance, and in profound silence, the person who will visit you at midnight. Herein fail not."

The parchment fell from the young traveller's hand, and, overcome by terror, he threw himself upon a seat, exclaiming—

"Holy Virgin defend me! This is a summons which even such as I dare not disobey!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE VEHM TRIBUNAL.

WHEN the first emotions of fear had subsided, the young traveller felt ashamed at having given way to that terror with which the appearance of the Cord and Dagger, and the imperious summons, had inspired him.

"What have I done," he said, in a musing tone, as he paced the apartment, "that I should be afraid of the Vehm Tribunal? I know that I dare not disobey its summons: I know that, were I to do so, the Free Count would adjudge me to death, and the secret servants of the Tribunal would exercise the sentence at any risk to themselves! Holy Virgin!" he continued, in a tone of increased excitement, "what is the power of emperors, archdukes, or princes, when an association of a hundred thousand men, linked by secret signs and modes of greeting, and including members of the highest as well as of the lowest classes—an association that takes the functions of the laws in its own hands, and tries and punishes in the name of the emperor and the empire—an association which causes to tremble the proudest lords and mightiest knights, when its servants raise their voices by night at the castle-gates of those feudal despots, and summon them, by the Cord and Dagger, before the Vehm—the power of the Emperor of Germany and King of the Romans is as nothing, I say, when weighed with that which this dread association exercises!"

The young man paused and shuddered in spite of himself; for he knew that the members of the Vehmgericht, or Secret Court, were bound by a fearful oath, and by the dread of death, to conceal the judgments which might be passed upon anyone; and he asked himself, "Can it be possible that any unknown or private enemy, belonging to the Vehm, can contemplate so terrible a fate for me?"

Then he paced the room with agitated steps.

"But, no," he said, after an interval of deep meditation, "these courts can never use their power, or direct their influence to private vengeance. They were founded as a barrier against the rude and brutal force of crime; and when the Emperor Sigismund, in 1429, became one of the initiated, he must have known well the principles which actuated them! Let me, then, confront with boldness these men who dare to judge even me;—and let me not show a craven heart in the presence of a tribunal against whose laws I am unconscious of having offended."

There was something noble and commanding about that young man, as he thus nerved himself to support an ordeal

which was known to be of a nature calculated to make the boldest tremble.

Midnight arrived, and found the traveller animated with that stern courage which he was resolved nothing should subdue.

Nor did he quail when he heard the bolts outside his chamber door cautiously drawn back.

That door was opened slowly; and a man, armed to the teeth, but whose countenance was totally unknown to the young traveller, entered the chamber.

In his hand he carried a naked poniard, around the handle of which was twisted the symbolic cord.

The traveller uttered not an exclamation of either surprise or fear, but bowed his head in acknowledgment of the authority whose messenger he was now prepared to accompany.

The man also observed a profound silence as he beckoned the traveller to follow him.

They descended the stairs, passed out of the tavern by the back way, and struck into a path, which soon led them into the forest of pines.

But as the young stranger accompanied the servant of the Vehm, he soon perceived that other armed men kept pace with them at a short distance.

The moment they entered the pine-forest, the messenger, who had charge of the traveller, lighted a torch; and the young stranger, as well as the dependants of the Vehm, who followed at short distances, took that sombre glare, which seemed a supernatural will-o'-the-wisp, as their guide.

Thus they all advanced in solemn silence through the dense mazes of the forest.

At length they came into an open space, where a rude chapel was constructed for the use of pious wayfarers.

There they stopped: and the messenger who had charge of the stranger now spoke for the first time.

"You must be blindfolded," he said; "but fear nothing: I am a mere dependant, and neither intend nor wish you harm."

"Whither are you leading me?" demanded the young stranger, who, in spite of himself, experienced a sense of vague and ineffable terror creeping over him.

The messenger pointed significantly to the dagger and cord, which now occupied a place in his girdle, amongst other formidable weapons—as much as to say, "You are going to the seat of that tribunal of which these are the emblems."

The stranger strove to conquer his emotions, and allowed himself to be blindfolded without resistance—for he knew that any attempts at such were vain, and fraught with appalling danger.

The party then resumed its march, the messenger carrying his torch in one hand, and leading the stranger by the hand.

In this manner they proceeded for nearly half an hour; when they came to a sudden halt.

Then the blast of a trumpet echoed around; and a voice exclaimed from an eminence—

"Who are ye?"

"Frieschoffen," cried the messenger, in answer to this challenge—thereby intimating that the officers of the Vehmgericht demanded admittance.

"Tis well," said the voice of the sentinel; and in a few minutes the young stranger heard the din of bars and the clanking of chains.

His military experience was sufficient to enable him to know that a portcullis was raised, a draw-bridge was lowered, and the massive gates of a fortified place were thrown open.

Nor was he mistaken; for, when the party resumed its march, he knew by the sound of his steps, and the vibration of the planks beneath, that he was passing over a draw-bridge. Then echo told him that he was proceeding beneath an archway; and thence he merged upon what he took to be a spacious paved court. Over the rugged stones he was led a short distance; then a door was opened; he was conducted up a narrow spiral stone staircase to a considerable height; and at length the messenger guided him into a room, where a blaze of light immediately struck his eyes, even beneath the thick bandage which had been tied over them.

"Loosen the bandage," said a voice, which did not seem altogether unfamiliar to the ears of the stranger, who was, however, labouring under too powerful a state of excitement to be very collected in his ideas.

For, in spite of that young man's courage, the incidents of the night—the mysterious journey through the forest, the uncertainty which he experienced relative to the place where he now was, and his knowledge of the

tremendous power, as well as the unscrupulous daring, of the tribunal before which he was about to appear—all these circumstances combined together constituted a source of terror calculated to dismay the most undaunted.

The bandage fell from his eyes.

He found himself in a large apartment, fitted up as a tribunal of justice.

At the farther end was a species of throne raised upon a dais, and overshadowed by a canopy of velvet; and on that exalted seat was the Free Count, or president of the court. He was dressed in rich apparel, as a knight or noble of the age; and bewildered though the young stranger was, he nevertheless recognised at a glance the thin and peculiar countenance of the monk whom he had met a few hours previously at the Black Swan.

On the benches, rising in an amphitheatrical semicircle round the dais, sat the members of the Vehmgericht, all bareheaded, and without arms or armour.

Upon a table, before the seat of the Free Count, lay the sword, which, as the archives of the Vehm record, "was deemed the symbol of supreme justice, at the same time representing in the form of its handle the cross of Christ." Near to it lay the *Wyd*, or coil of cord, emblematic of the right which the tribunal assumed over life and death.

The hall was illuminated with numerous candles, placed in rude iron branches, fixed against the wall, beneath niches containing images of the saints.

"Peace!" exclaimed the Free Count; and in a moment the din of voices sank into low whisperings.

"Peace!" said the Free Count a second time; and the whispering subsided into indistinct murmurs.

"Peace!" cried the Free Count a third time; and the most solemn silence instantly prevailed.

"Let the individuals cited stand forward," said the Count, after a short pause.

"I am here," answered the stranger, advancing into the centre of the semi-circle.

"Why are you here?" asked the Free Count.

"In obedience to the summons of the Cord and Dagger," was the firm reply; for the young man had now recovered his wonted self-possession.

"Then you were aware of the power and competency of that tribunal which the Cord and Dagger represent?"

"I am aware of the power of this tribunal," answered the stranger.

"Do you deny its competency?" demanded the Free Count.

The young traveller made no reply.

"We will endeavour to teach you whether we be competent or not," said the Count. "What is your name?"

"Nay, surely you must know me," exclaimed the stranger; "or else why summon me hither?"

"We do not put replies into your mouth," observed the Free Count. "Under what name are you travelling?—if that mode of interrogatory suit your purpose better."

"As a simple citizen, my passport from the Imperial Chancery at Vienna being made out in the name of Charles Hamel. Here it is."

And the young man took a roll of parchment from the breast of his doublet, and handed it to the presiding judge.

"A simple citizen!" exclaimed the Free Count, ironically. "And yet that reply suits us as well as any other, for all are equal in the presence of the Vehmgericht. Whither were you proceeding?"

"To the Castle of Rosenthal," was the answer.

"Do you know why you have been summoned hither?"

"I do not," said Hamel, haughtily.

"Read that document," continued the Free Count.

A messenger handed a large sheet of parchment to the prisoner, who immediately began to peruse the lengthy document with profound attention and interest.

This task occupied nearly a quarter of an hour, during which the countenance of the young man became red and white by turns, in accordance with the various emotions that agitated his breast.

"I have read it," he at length said; and he tossed the document indignantly upon the floor.

"You are required to sign that, and you will then be free," observed the president.

"And if I refuse?" demanded Hamel.

"Death is the only alternative," answered the Free Count, solemnly.

"You know whom you thus threaten? You are aware whose life you thus dare to menace?" cried the prisoner, drawing himself up to his full height, and speaking in a tone of proud authority.

"We know all," replied the Free Count, laconically. "It is not for us to implore nor beseech: our function is to command. Nevertheless, I, the Free Count of this tribunal, earnestly pray you to accede to the conditions named in that document which you so unwisely spurn."

"Never," exclaimed the young man, in a tone of gallant resolution.

"Then must the law of the sacred Vehm take its course," cried the president. "Once more, reflect."

"I have no need of reflection," said Hamel, firmly. "'Tis for you to reflect whether you dare perpetrate this atrocity, which will make every echo of vengeance ring against you throughout the Germanic and Roman empires."

"Stubborn boy," ejaculated the Free Count, "you drive me to a cruel extremity. Nevertheless, seeing that you are confirmed in your wilful obstinacy, the law of the Vehm must take its course. The sentence of the tribunal must be pronounced."

The president paused for a few moments, apparently to draw breath, but in reality to give Hamel an opportunity to recall his refusal to comply with the conditions proposed to him.

But the young man maintained a profound and dignified silence.

Then, while the eye of everyone present was fixed with extraordinary interest upon the prisoner, the Free Count passed the terrific sentence of the Vehm in the following terms:—

"As now a certain individual who chooses to pass by the name of Hamel has been cited, prosecuted, and adjudged before me, he having appeared in obedience to a summons of the Cord and Dagger; and whereas he is so indifferent to the vital interests of this empire as to object to certain proposals made to him in writing, in presence of certain competent members who have all been made cognisant of those conditions; whereas, moreover, he will neither render deference to honour nor justice, and holds in contempt the highest tribunal of the holy empire—I hereby denounce him, by all the royal power and force as is just and proper, and in accordance with the imperial and royal ban. I declare him to be an outcast, unworthy of the peace, justice, and freedom which he has enjoyed ever since he was baptized; I declare him unworthy of the four elements which God made and gave as a solace to human nature;—I denounce him as a being without right, without law, without peace, without honour, without security;—I declare him to be condemned and lost, so that any man may act towards him as with any other capital criminal; and I herewith curse his flesh and blood; and may his body never receive burial; but may it be borne away by the wind, and may the ravens and crows, and wild birds of prey, consume and destroy him. And I hereby adjudge his neck to the rope, and his body to be devoured by the birds and beasts of the air, sea, and land; but his soul I commend to the Lord of heaven, if he will receive it."\*

Having pronounced this awful sentence, which the young man heard without dismay, the Free Count took a rope from behind his seat, and threw it into the midst of the semicircle.

Six servants of the Vehm rushed forward: and while one took up the cord, the others seized upon the condemned prisoner.

\* This was indeed the terrible formula of the sentences of death pronounced by the Vehmgericht. A recently published German work, in a chapter devoted to the subject of the Vehmgericht, and after enumerating the horrors of the tribunal, says, "Besides this, the Schöffen of this secret court possessed the privilege of hanging without a trial every criminal *taken in the fact*, if, faithful to the laws of honour, they took nothing from him which they found about him, and left behind the sign of the Vehm. We are astonished when we contemplate this terrific and mighty power of the Schöffen alliance, and can at the same time easily comprehend how the most extraordinary traditions of this *Vehmgericht*, based upon their nocturnal assemblies, their mysterious customs, their initiation and course of justice, together with their condemnation and execution of the criminal, have been preserved in the mouths of the people, for even the plain historical descriptions thereof are sufficiently striking. That the power of the Free Counts was not exaggerated by the mere imagination, excited by terror, nor in reality by any means insignificant, is proved by a hundred undeniable examples, supported by records and testimonies, that numerous princes, counts, knights, and wealthy citizens were seized by these Schöffen of the tribunal, and in execution of its sentence perished by their hands.

"I command thee," said the Free Count, addressing himself to the servitors of the tribunal, "to lead the criminal forth into the forest, and there within the hour fulfil this most just sentence. And, according to usage, I do ordain that, as a sign of his having been executed by the holy Vehm, and not put to death by banditti or private enemies, ye do stick a dagger girt with a cord in the tree whereto he shall be suspended by the neck."

Then Charles Hamel raised his voice, and said—

"I protest, by all laws human and divine, against this most foul and atrocious wrong; and I pray to Almighty God that he will so move the heart of some good knight now present as to induce him to report the deed—"

"Silence, criminal," exclaimed the Free Count; "the members of the Vehm dare not mention what occurs in the holy tribunal, even though the condemned be their brother, son, father, or dear friend. Minions, away with him."

The servitors of the Vehmgericht hurried the young man from the apartment; and this time, as they led him down the spiral staircase of the donjon, and across the spacious court of a strong castle, they did not bandage his eyes.

There was no need to conceal the seat of the tribunal from a man about to die!

The moon rode high in the heavens; and its soft mellow light was commingled with that of innumerable stars, which shone like diamonds upon a velvet canopy of the deepest purple.

But as the young man glanced upwards, the mighty towers and lofty battlements of the castle stood out all black and sombre, in strong relief, within the circuit of his view.

Little time and little inclination, however, had the poor young man for a survey of the scene around him; for his mind was filled with the most melancholy reflections.

All hope of escape was vain: his own rapier had been taken from him; and six drawn swords formed an impenetrable fence around him.

He accordingly resigned himself to his fate; and now prayed earnestly, but inaudibly, as he proceeded to the place of execution.

The portcullis was lifted up once more; the massive gates were thrown open; the drawbridge was lowered; and the mournful procession passed beyond the precincts of the castle.

The foremost of the servitors of the Vehm carried a torch, which shed a lurid glare around, and the black smoke of which ever and anon swept over the countenances of those behind.

Not a word was spoken as they thus pursued their way.

At length they entered the pine forests, into the depths of which they plunged, the man with the torch acting as their guide.

In a short time the party reached the open space where the little chapel stood.

"It is here that you are to die," said the officer who commanded the band, as he pointed to a tall tree, "and at that shrine you can pay your last devotions."

Charles made no reply, but walked with a firm step to the front of the altar, which was protected by a range of solid iron bars.

There he knelt and prayed fervently for several minutes, his guards forming a semicircle behind him.

At length he rose, and said, in a tone which trembled not nor expressed the slightest fear—

"I am ready."

The officer could not help exclaiming, "You are a brave man!"

"I know how to die, rather than succumb to the tyrants of your tribunal," answered Hamel.

One of the men now threw a long cord over the arm of the tall tree which the officer had already indicated; and the noose was slipped round the neck of the condemned, while another of the band pinioned his arms.

The young man went through this fearful ceremony without a murmur; his lips only moved in prayer.

And now all was in readiness for the consummation, and the condition of the victim seemed beyond the chance of human relief.

But at the very moment when two of the servitors were about to run the young man up to the bough which waved so ominously over his head, a tall form, muffled in a long dark cloak, suddenly appeared upon the spot.

"Release your prey!" exclaimed the stranger, in a commanding tone; and drawing his sword, with the rapidity of lightning he severed the cord with a blow.



"Seize him!" cried the officer; "we will teach him thus to meddle with the justice of the Vehm."

Two of the servitors secured Charles Hamel, while the remainder precipitated themselves upon the stranger.

"Rash fools!" he exclaimed, in a tone of withering contempt; ye know not whom ye would assail. Stand back!"

To the astonishment of Hamel, who had expected to behold the generous stranger immolated upon the spot, the men retreated as if panic-struck, and dropped their weapons by a simultaneous but incomprehensible impulse. The torch also fell, but burnt as it lay upon the ground.

Then, without any degree of haste, but rather with the leisurely movements of a person having no danger to apprehend, and no fear of interruption to entertain, the stranger advanced towards Hamel, pushed aside the two guards who still held him in their grasp, and with his sword cut the cord that pinioned the young man's arms.

"Follow me," said the stranger; and striking into the forest, he led the way—not precipitately, as if afraid of pursuit, but with a moderate speed, as if perfectly at his ease, in spite of the perilous action which he had committed in venturing to interpose himself between the Vehmgericht and its victim.

Hamel followed him in amazement, while the servitors of the Vehm stood motionless as statues, as if a spell had riveted them to the spot; but by the light of the still burning torch, which played upon their features, the young man perceived that their countenances wore an undefinable expression of mingled horror, wonder, and dismay.

"Let us hasten our steps, generous stranger," said Charles, "or we may be overtaken yet."

"Were an army to pursue you," answered his mysterious deliverer, "you would be safe with me."

These words were uttered in a tone of calm conviction, and not of empty vaunt; and Hamel was almost stupefied when he reflected that their truth was justified by the extraordinary facility with which the stranger had effected his deliverance.

Still he was unwilling to believe that there was anything supernatural in the transaction; but he clung to the idea that his deliverer was some powerful chief of the Vehm, who, for reasons as yet unknown, and by means of some sign unseen by him, had been enabled to produce such a sudden effect upon the myrmidons of the tribunal.

Nevertheless, Hamel experienced a strange feeling of awe as he followed the stranger through the forest, and this sensation prevented him from intruding upon the silence which the other observed.

In a short time they emerged from the forest, and Hamel beheld the village of Kemberg at a little distance, the slated roofs of its houses bathed in the mellowed flood of the moonlight.

When they reached the entrance of the village, the dark-cloaked stranger, of whose countenance Hamel had not as yet caught a glimpse, so closely was it muffled, turned shortly round, and said—

"Remain here for a few moments—I will fetch you your steed."

He then hurried away, and was almost immediately out of sight.

Hamel now felt alarmed at being alone. A thousand vague fears haunted him; he had not shrunk from death; but he trembled lest he should be captured by the officers of the Vehm; and his mind was, moreover, agitated by certain wild and indefinite ideas relative to his strange deliverer.

He thought of hastening, with all possible speed, towards the Castle of Rosenthal, where he was sure of obtaining protection. But, alas! he suddenly remembered that his credentials to the Baron were in the little valise which was attached to the back part of his saddle when he journeyed, but which had been taken into his room at the Black Swan, ere he had retired thither in the evening.

He was in the middle of his conflicting reflections and plans, when the tramp of horses suddenly fell upon his ears, and in a few moments his mysterious deliverer galloped up to the spot.

He was mounted upon a tall and powerful coal-black steed, and he led Hamel's gallant chestnut, now perfectly recovered, by the bridle.

"Mount," said the stranger, laconically.

Hamel gladly obeyed; but, to his profound surprise, he perceived, as he sprang upon his horse's back, his valise fastened to the saddle, as if it had not been removed.

"Even my valise of necessities and papers!" he exclaimed, unable to contain his astonishment.

"Yes," said his deliverer, carelessly, "I fancy you will find that nothing has been left behind."

"But who are you, then, that has thus befriended me, generous man?" cried Hamel; "and by what name may I thank my deliverer?"

"We shall meet again, and I will then tell you," was the calm reply.

"We shall meet again!" repeated Hamel, powerfully excited; "where shall we thus meet?"

"At Rosenthal Castle," answered the stranger. "You are going thither—the road is now straight as an arrow before you. Fear not farther molestation. You are well protected," added he, with a strange laugh, "though you know it not. Seven days hence there will be a grand festival at Rosenthal Castle—I shall be there!"

With these words, the mysterious stranger put spurs to his coal-black horse, the powerful animal stretched like a greyhound along the road, and both rider and steed disappeared with the rapidity of a whirlwind.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ROSENTHAL CASTLE.

THE ancestral fortalice of the proud Baron of Rosenthal was situate upon an eminence, at a short distance from Wittenberg.

It was one of those old feudal castles, the ruins of which are still to be seen crowning the heights that overhang the principal rivers of Germany.

The stronghold of Rosenthal was nearly a quarter of a mile in circumference, for within its walls there was a perfect town. In fact it was built to stand a long siege in case of need, and contained granaries, armouries, and barracks, capable of maintaining a garrison of a thousand men for at least a year, even if all communication with the town were cut off.

A proud and mighty lord, then, was the Baron of Rosenthal: his domains were spacious, his vassals numerous, and his coffers wealthy; and so powerful was he, that, when in her infancy, his daughter Theresa had been contracted to his Imperial Highness the Archduke Leopold, who was also a child when that betrothal took place.

But the Baron had one especial cause of constant annoyance, and that was the enmity which subsisted between himself and Count Manfred of Linsdorf, a neighbouring feudal lord, as powerful as himself.

For Count Manfred had demanded the hand of the Lady Theresa in marriage; but the bold aspirant was fifty years of age, enjoyed not the best repute, and was, moreover, eclipsed by the more splendid contract which had been made between her and the Archduke. He was consequently refused by the Baron of Rosenthal; but from that moment (about two years before the opening of our tale) the count had cherished the most inveterate malignity against his great feudal rival.

Then commenced a series of contentions between the vassals of the two domains; mutual incursions and inroads took place; a constant interchange of complaints and demands for redress sprang up; and the worthy citizens of Wittenberg lived in daily expectation of seeing actual warfare break out between the two chiefs.

The Baron of Rosenthal had lost his wife shortly after the birth of Theresa, who was his only child; and he had not thought of marrying again, for he was deeply attached to his daughter, and wished that his immense wealth and extensive domains should descend to her at his decease. For as he fondly hoped that the infantine betrothal would be now shortly realized, he regarded the heirship of Rosenthal as a prospective appanage, that rendered his daughter well worthy of the archduke.

It only remains for us to observe, ere we pursue our tale, that Theresa and the Archduke had never seen each other; nor had the Baron of Rosenthal ever beheld his intended son-in-law since the young prince was a child of six or seven years old.

Thus stood the position of affairs at the period when this narrative commenced.

We shall now request our readers to imagine to themselves the lovely Theresa, sitting at her embroidery in one of the sumptuous saloons of Rosenthal Castle.

Her two favourite maidens, Ida and Maria, were seated on low ottomans near her, engaged with their spinning-wheels—for such was the usual employment of the superior class of female dependants in those times.



Theresa was surpassingly lovely. Her figure was tall, slight, and faultlessly symmetrical; her bodice, which fitted tightly to her swelling bust, gave her a short waist, in accordance with the fashion of the time; and thus the length of her form, from that slender waist to the elegant slippers which imprisoned her little feet, imparted to her appearance a sylph-like and yet commanding air. Then, when she walked, her step was so light, that it seemed as if her delicate foot would scarcely crush the most fragile flower; and when she joined in the mazes of the dance, her lovely form appeared to float, with aerial grace, upon the wing of the zephyr.

Her fair hair, clustering in rich curls on either side, and collected in braids behind her exquisitely formed head, set off a face whose transparent complexion and soft beauty were calculated to ravish the least susceptible heart.

Hers was not that beauty, so gorgeous, so grand, and so splendid, which bursts upon the eye like the noonday sun, and wherein the awe of majesty is blended with a lustre too dazzling to be gazed upon: hers was not the beauty suited to an empress or a queen; but it was a loveliness which stole gradually upon the senses, like the soft light of the spring morning, and on which the eye, awaking by degrees to the influence of those charms, is at length riveted by an invincible fascination.

Ida and Maria were two sweet creatures, and would have been deemed very beautiful, were their mistress not nigh to eclipse them. They were respectively nineteen and seventeen, and were attired in a plain and unassuming manner, which seemed to denote the good taste and unpretending disposition of the lady whose slightest pleasure they were bound to consult.

Ida was a brunette, with glossy black hair, large dark eyes, and a fine form; Maria was fair, like her mistress, with light hair, blue eyes, and a delicate shape.

These three maidens were occupied in the manner already described, the day after the events recorded in the two preceding chapters.

It was noon; but the rays of the bright sun which streamed into the saloon where Theresa and her maidens were seated, were mellowed to a soft and pleasant lustre by the stained glass of the casements.

"What think you, girls, of my father's guest?" asked Theresa, after a long pause, during which the young lady had been plunged into a melancholy reverie.

"I caught but a parting glimpse of him ere now, as he repaired to the hall where the morning meal was served," answered Ida; "and, save that he was somewhat pale and careworn, methought his appearance was of a most comely kind."

"It seems that he met with some vexations during the early part of the night, at the village of Kemberg," said Theresa; "but of what nature he did not speak. Indeed, he avoided the subject the moment he broached it."

"Old Fritz, the porter, assures me that the countenance of the young gentleman was as pale as death, and his manner strange—nay, even wild beyond conception, when he sounded the trumpet for admittance, at about three o'clock this morning," said Ida.

"He was doubtless alarmed by his journey amidst the pines during the hours of darkness," observed the bashful but beautiful Maria.

"May it please your ladyship, of what degree is Messer Hamel?" asked Ida.

"Of his family my father knows nothing, I believe," replied Theresa. "Indeed, all that he does know concerning his young guest is contained in the letter which Messer Hamel presented to him ere now, previous to the morning's repast. That letter was from the Arch-Chancellor of the Empire, and recommended Messer Hamel to the good care and attention of the faithful lords and peers of the empire; enjoining them to award him hospitality wheresoever he should demand it; and stating that he was a gentleman of good family, travelling for his pleasure—and in accordance with that good pleasure, travelling alone."

"And of course my lord received with befitting welcome a guest so well recommended," said Ida.

"As in duty bound, my girl," answered Theresa; then, with a melancholy smile, she added, "But wherefore are you thus curious concerning him, Ida? Hast thou lost thine heart already?"

"No, lady—I'm afraid to love," replied the dependant, somewhat seriously; "but men are ever deceivers."

"Alas! well mayst thou say that," observed Theresa, with a mournful air. "You are both aware of that affection which I formed, and which—in spite of myself—I still entertain for the poor but handsome student—"

"Oh! lady, has he not proved himself an ingrate, unworthy of such a love as thine?" asked Ida.

"We will not judge him hastily," said Theresa. "For six long months I heard nought of him; he was as one dead to everything, save the unextinguishable vitality of my love! My father told me that he had fled from Wittenberg, and espoused a low-born maiden in another state. You both believed the tale—"

"Because it accorded so well with the known faithlessness of men," said Ida.

"And I gave credence to it, because methought his lordship, your noble father, my lady, could not err," added the gentle Maria.

"And I alone believed not the tale," continued Theresa.

"Holy Virgin, forgive me for doubting my parent! but something seemed to whisper to me, 'Wilhelm lives, and loves thee still!' Nor was I deceived. But—merciful heavens! how did the truth reach me? You well remember how abruptly the tidings came that Faust was condemned to die, for certain high crimes and treasons, after having languished for six months in the prison of Wittenberg! Oh! that fatal morning, when the scaffold was prepared for him whom to save I would have given my own life!"

"Dost thou then love him so very fondly, lady?" asked Maria, timidly, but with a glance of infinite affection towards her mistress.

"Thou knowest how well I love him, girl! I was reclining on the sofa in my own chamber, contemplating his portrait—that portrait which thy brother, Ida, drew of him, and which Wilhelm never knew that I possessed; I was gazing on his portrait, I say, marvelling when I should behold the dear original again. Then a strange thing occurred. It suddenly seemed to me that Faust was gazing upon me from a great distance—and only for a few moments; and there appeared to be a rapid transference of ardent passion—a sort of blending spirit—between us! But I know that this was a mere delusion of my imagination."

"And yet how singular!" exclaimed Ida.

"Most singular," murmured Maria.

"Alas! that sweet reverie was cruelly interrupted!" continued Theresa. "My father entered, and imparted to me the sad truth that Faust was about to die—that the scaffold was even then erected in the great square of Wittenberg. Oh! in that moment of bitter anguish I reproached my sire as the cause of this fatal deed. How indignantly did he deny the imputation; and I fell insensible at his feet."

"It was then that he summoned us, lady," said Ida; "and we bore you to your couch, where you lay, as we thought dying, for some hours."

"Yes: and how joyous, yet how wonderful was the news with which you greeted me when I awoke once more to life and consciousness! Wilhelm had escaped—nons knew how!"

"And no one has since discovered how, I understand," observed Ida.

"The authorities have endeavoured to hush up the matter as well as they could, I believe," added Maria.

"And nearly two weeks—two long weeks—have passed since that terrible day," continued Theresa; "and I have not seen him."

"But what is more extraordinary still," said Ida, "he has been seen—aye, and spoken to, in Wittenberg, and none molest him; the authorities seek not to put their sentence in execution against him."

"The Holy Virgin be thanked for that!" exclaimed Theresa, fervently.

At this moment the conversation, which, as the reader may perceive, was gradually growing more interesting amongst the three maidens, was interrupted in a manner calculated to fill them with the most lively apprehensions.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ATTACK.

THE conversation between the Lady Theresa and her two maidens was cut short by the sudden entrance of a man-at-arms.

"Pardon for this rude intrusion, my lady," exclaimed the warrior; "but I have sorry news for thy tender ears."

"Speak, good Dewitz," said Theresa, starting from her seat, an example which was instantaneously followed by her affrighted maids, when they beheld the captain of

the castle (the Baron's chief officer) enter in an evident state of unusual perturbation.

"You must retire to the donjon, fair lady," returned the captain; "for in a short time we shall have hot work upon the ramparts, and a stray shot from the enemy might reach this apartment."

"The enemy," ejaculated Theresa.

"The enemy!" repeated Ida and Maria, in the same breath as it were.

"Yes, lady; but fear not," answered Dewitz. "The proud Count of Linsdorf is marching against us at the head of a powerful force. Away, ladies, to the donjon; there no harm can reach you."

"And my father?" cried Theresa, catching the old warrior by the arm.

"He is on the ramparts, commanding the preparations for defence," replied Dewitz. "He sent me to you with the message which I have delivered. Messer Hamel is with him, and seems well disposed to take his part in the play."

Dewitz then bowed his plumed head, and hastened from the apartment. His huge sword clanking upon the floor of the corridor outside as he retired, raised a din which struck ominously to the hearts of the three maidens.

Theresa did not however delay in following the advice conveyed to her from her father, but withdrew to the donjon, or keep, in pursuance of that counsel.

Meantime a herald from the Count of Linsdorf had arrived at the gate of Rosenthal Castle, having a white pennon upon his lance, and demanding a parley.

The Baron, accompanied by Hamel, hastened to the tower which commanded the principal entrance, and answered the herald, who stood on the opposite side of moat, the drawbridge having been already raised at the first news of the advance of a hostile force.

"What wouldst thou?" demanded the Baron, in a loud tone.

"I require, in the name of the high and mighty lord the Count of Linsdorf," answered the herald, "that a certain individual, bearing the name of Hamel, and whom he has good reason to suppose an inmate of Rosenthal Castle, be now and forthwith delivered up to me, under fitting escort to ensure his safe arrival in the presence of my Lord of Linsdorf; and this demand I make for good and sufficient reason, which there is no need to reveal."

"Whatever offence Messer Hamel may have committed against thy lord," answered the Baron, "he is now my guest; and, by the laws of hospitality, I will defend his person to the death. Take back that reply to thy proud master."

"Then against thee and thine, my Lord of Rosenthal," exclaimed the herald, "I hurl defiance, in the name of the high and mighty Count of Linsdorf!"

With these words the herald drew the gauntlet from his right hand, and threw it with all his force across the moat, against the escarp of the castle wall.

"We accept the defiance," said the Baron.

"My lord," said Hamel, "I would not that I should be the cause of that waste of human life which must inevitably ensue; and yet I declare to thee most solemnly that I know not how I could have incurred the Count's displeasure, for, to my belief, I never saw him in my life. True, I spoke of him somewhat freely to a monk, whom I afterwards saw elsewhere in another guise—"

"Gramercy for thine explanations, Messer Hamel," interrupted the doughty Baron. "Thou art my guest, and thou shalt be protected: thou art well recommended to all the barons of the empire, and to the Lord of Rosenthal in particular, and thou shalt find that I am not unmindful of the quarter whence such commendation cometh. To work, then; thou shalt aid us in resisting yon proud chieftain."

"To the death!" cried Charles, laying his hand upon the sword with which he had already provided himself. "Generous noble!" believe me, thy gallantry shall be recompensed in a manner—"

The Baron stayed not to listen to the young man, but bustled about the ramparts, giving his orders with all the cheerfulness and experience of a practised warrior.

He was a tall, powerfully built man, of about fifty; his countenance was stern and haughty, as was his disposition; and, being naturally a cruel and uncompromising temperament, the thought of bloodshed was to him nothing more than a casualty inevitably connected with his high feudal position in respect to a powerful rival.

He wore a bright helmet with crimson plumes upon his brow; a corslet of polished steel, inlaid with gold, defended

his body; cuishes and steel boots protected his legs. By his side was an immense two-handed sword; and in his hand he carried a carbine.

"Well, good Dewitz," he exclaimed, accosting his captain; "how fare the preparations?"

"My lord may glance along the wall, and he will see twenty good carronades pointed in the direction whence the enemy are advancing," answered Dewitz. "All other points are equally well defended."

"How many men muster ye?"

"Three hundred and seven, my lord. A messenger has gone to Wittenberg to command the authorities, in your lordship's name, to send up reinforcements; and other couriers have been despatched to summon the vassals of Rosenthal."

"Good!" cried the Baron. "What opinion have you of the enemy?"

"The man who first brought us tidings of the hostile march reported them as being nine hundred strong," replied Dewitz. "Since then a scout, whom I sent forth, has returned, with news to the effect that a thousand men march under the banner of Linsdorf."

"Little reck we for the proud Count's numbers," cried the Lord of Rosenthal. "I am not sorry that the thunder, which has now for two years growled in the distance, is about to burst at length: I was weary of petty contentions, and regret not that we may come to blows in right earnest."

"I entertain my lord's opinion," said the captain of the castle. "When our reinforcements arrive we will sally forth and give them fair and equal battle."

"Well spoken, good Dewitz. But see, the van of the Count's troops are already defiling from the forest."

This was indeed true. At a distance of about a mile a dense column of infantry was issuing from the wood; and a few moments afterwards a small band of cannoniers, dragging heavy field-pieces, appeared at the angle of the forest, three hundred yards to the right of the body that was first seen. The artillery had evidently made a circuit in order to avail itself of the main road, which allowed free locomotion for the cannon.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, during which a force of about a thousand men had emerged from the thickets of the forest, or from the road which wound circuitously by its side; and, at the expiration of that interval, a band of upwards of fifty horsemen appeared from the same direction as that taken by the artillery.

"There is the Count himself, in complete armour, attended by his knights," exclaimed Dewitz.

The captain of the castle waited a few minutes longer to watch the proceedings of the enemy; and at length observing that they advanced, he gave a signal to his men.

The cannoniers who manned the wall-pieces instantly obeyed that sign; the guns vomited forth clouds of smoke and flame; and the thunder of the artillery raised every echo throughout the fortalice.

"We have reached them!" cried the Baron, perceiving a stir amongst the enemy, which, to his experienced eye, showed that the cannon had been pointed with good effect.

"Yes," said Dewitz, coolly; "our good carthouns, sakers, and falconets,\* have done their duty."

The troops of Linsdorf now formed into three columns, in addition to the isolated march of the artillery, and advanced with extraordinary rapidity towards the castle.

"The Count is wrong, he should have kept to the left," said the Baron, examining the motions of the enemy with a critical eye.

"No, my lord," returned Dewitz; "he is going to make the most of his numbers. He has perhaps learnt the weakness of our garrison, unaware as we were of so sudden an ebullition of hostilities; and he intends to direct all his force against our principal gate."

"Right, good Dewitz; let those four double-carthouns be wheeled more towards the postern."

This order was immediately obeyed.

And now the artillery on the castle wall again sent forth its thunderbolts of destruction; but the volley was immediately returned from an eminence on which the Count of Linsdorf had by this time posted his cannon.

"They have bombard on their side, Dewitz," exclaimed the Baron, as a shell fell and exploded on the opposite side of the moat, at a distance of about fifty yards from the counterscarp.

"Our bombard will match them, my lord," replied

\* The names of the best species of artillery then in use.

the undaunted Dewitz. "See—our men are preparing them on the tower over the entrance."

The conflict now became animated; the men of Rosenthal no longer waited for a signal to discharge their wall-pieces, but fired them as rapidly as they could reload.

A strong body of men-at-arms, furnished with escalading ladders, was seen advancing, under cover of the Linsdorf artillery, towards the gate; and, in a short time, that detachment reached the opposite side of the moat.

Reckless of the terrific fire that played upon them from the artillery and carbineers upon the walls, the soldiers of Count Linsdorf hastily constructed a number of rafts by means of planks which they bore with them; and in a short time they were floating across the moat; while the remainder of the enemy's infantry advanced to keep the foe occupied on the ramparts, and thus cover the attack of the escalading party.

And now the conflict became fearful in the extreme. Three times did the assailants plant their ladders against the wall, and mount to the escalade; and three times were they repulsed.

The Baron, Hamel, Dewitz, and the soldiers of Rosenthal performed prodigies of valour; but numbers were against them; and the bombards of the enemy did more desperate execution than the stalwart captain of the castle had anticipated.

A fourth assault was made by the besiegers; and at that terrible crisis, a panic seized upon the vassals of Rosenthal.

A murmur ran along the walls that another force belonging to the enemy had assailed the castle on the opposite side, and had totally repulsed the Rosenthal vassals who defended that point.

In a few minutes these tidings were ascertained to be too true: a wounded vassal hurried up to the Baron of Rosenthal, exclaiming, "All is lost, my lord! The soldiers of Linsdorf have gained the western wall, and have assaulted the donjon!"

"My daughter!" ejaculated the Baron, maddened by these tidings: "haste to the defence of my daughter!"

But his words were unheeded: Dewitz was endeavouring to rally his panic-struck troops; and Charles Hamel was closely pressed by two of the scaling party who had already succeeded in obtaining a footing upon the rampart.

Hamel, weak with loss of blood, was about to yield to the united strength of the two soldiers who were assailing him;—already was the weapon of the foremost raised to inflict upon him the death-blow,—when a knight, clad in complete armour, with his vizor closed, and with snow-white plumes waving above his shining helm, suddenly appeared upon the wall.

Waving his sword, apparently rather as a commanding wand than as a weapon of offence, the stranger knight repelled the two soldiers who were about to immolate Hamel to their rage; and they retreated horror-struck to their scaling ladders, down which they fell headlong, in their haste to retreat, and perished in the moat.

Then the knight passed hastily along the wall: the escalading forces of Linsdorf shrank from him as he waved his threatening weapon; the men of Rosenthal rallied as suddenly as they had been panic-struck; and in a few minutes the ramparts were cleared of the enemy.

Still the knight passed along the wall, but so rapidly, in spite of his heavy armour, that the vassals of Rosenthal, who had rallied as if by a spell under the magic influence of his appearance, could scarcely keep pace with him.

On—on he went, until he reached the western rampart, which was occupied by the troops of Linsdorf.

"Charge them!" cried the knight, now speaking for the first time: "you will obtain an easy victory!"

The troops of Rosenthal burst with irresistible fury upon the besiegers, and put them to a complete rout. In proportion as the former seemed animated by the presence of the knight, so did the latter appear dispirited.

But what was more singular still, the knight himself now took no part in the fray: leaning in a stately manner upon his naked sword at a little distance, that unexpected champion of Rosenthal seemed to content himself with contemplating the success which his presence ensured.

And that success was complete.

The sun went down amidst curtains of gold, and purple, and red; and by that hour the castle of Rosenthal was delivered.

But, alas! the conflict had not been unattended with dire disasters.

In addition to the sorrow created by the fall of many of the bravest soldiers of Rosenthal, another source of ineffable woe was communicated to the Baron, to damp the joy excited by this signal deliverance.

The enemy, during the interval of their success, had forced the donjon, and carried off the Lady Theresa!

And now where was the knight who had so suddenly appeared to turn the fortune of the day? Who was he? Whence had he come? Whither had he gone?

None knew him; no one could say how he had gained admittance to the castle; no one remembered to have seen him leave it.

All that regarded him was a complete—an impenetrable mystery.

Charles Hamel alone entertained a suspicion concerning him; but he dared not mention it. An invincible influence appeared to seal his lips, and fill him with vague terrors, when he was about to express his thoughts upon the subject.

But that the author of his deliverance on this occasion was not unconnected with him who had saved him from the myrmidons of the Vehm, he felt convinced.

His meditations were interrupted by a request to attend the Baron, Dewitz, and the chief officers of the garrison, at a council which was summoned to deliberate upon the best mode to pursue in order to effect the rescue of the Lady Theresa.

## CHAPTER V.

### HAMEL AND DEWITZ.

"FRIENDS and faithful followers," said the Baron, when the council was assembled, "there can be no doubt that the false caittiff, the proud Lord of Linsdorf, has inflicted upon me this grievous wrong. From the account given me by Ida, my daughter's chief handmaid, it would appear that half a dozen of the Linsdorf men-at-arms burst into the chamber where the Lady Theresa and her females had taken refuge; and, selecting the Lady Theresa from the rest, bore her forcibly away. Ye all know that I refused to bestow her fair hand upon the Count Manfred; and now he has robbed me of a jewel which was destined for a Prince!"

"My lord," said Dewitz, "the town authorities have promised two hundred men to-morrow by daybreak; the vassals of Rosenthal have already begun to pour in from all points; and by sun-rise twelve hundred brave warriors will have mustered beneath the banner of Rosenthal. If thou thinkest well, entrust the command to thy faithful servant who now addresses you: and I will rescue the Lady Theresa, or perish before the walls of Linsdorf Castle."

"And in the meantime the false Count may force my daughter into marriage with him," said the Baron.

"Knows he that the Lady Theresa is betrothed to a Prince of the German Empire?" demanded Hamel.

"He knows it right well," answered the Baron; "but he is capable of defying the Emperor himself. Invested with some mystic influence, he has powerful friends amongst the principal chieftains all around; and he has often boasted that even the great Maximilian, who sits upon the throne of the Cæsars, dares not gainsay him."

"Insolent vassal!" ejaculated Charles Hamel, a smile of ineffable pride and scorn curling his lip; then, after a minute's pause, he added, "But, as I have brought all this trouble on your lordship, permit me to repair to Linsdorf Castle, and reason with its haughty lord."

"You would risk your life in vain, generous young man," returned the Baron. "But know you how you have provoked the anger of Count Manfred, that he should have demanded you to be delivered up to him?"

"I can only suppose that certain observations which I made last evening to a monk at the hostel of Kemberg must have reached the Count's ears, and provoked his anger," answered Hamel.

It however now struck him for the first time that the extraordinary measures adopted by the Count to obtain possession of his person, might be connected with the proceedings of the Vehm; but on this head he dared not utter a word.

"I see it all!" suddenly exclaimed the Baron. "Count Manfred sought an occasion to carry off my daughter by violence; he knew full well that I should spurn his demand to deliver up to him a guest who claimed the rights of hospitality at my hands: and there was his excuse for assailing my dwelling."

"Such is doubtless the true reading of his conduct, my lord," observed Dewitz. "Violence must be met by violence."

"Then, by Saint Jude!" cried the Baron, dashing his hand violently upon the table; "we will settle this quarrel at the sword's point! Be it so as you say, good Dewitz; at day-break we will march against the recreant Count. I will lead my faithful troops in my daughter's cause."

The Baron rose; and the council broke up.

That evening the banquetting-hall was deserted in Rosenthal Castle. Hasty refreshment was snatched by each individual; and all then applied themselves to the preparations for the morrow's march.

But amidst the various arrangements which he had to superintend, Dewitz found a leisure half hour to walk round the ramparts with Charles Hamel, to whom the old soldier had formed an attachment. The stalwart captain had not failed to observe how gallantly the young man had comported himself in the day's conflict; and bravery was ever a ready passport to the old warrior's esteem.

"What think you will be the issue of to-morrow's fray?" asked Charles.

"I have every hope," answered Dewitz; "and if the varlets who will gather beneath our banner, only remain firm and perform their duty, the red flag of Rosenthal shall in twenty-four hours float over the Donjon of Linsdorf."

"Is the Castle of Linsdorf deemed strong by those well skilled in military craft?" inquired Charles.

"It has its weak points, as I will show thee ere we be a day older. Moreover, the forest is so near it as to afford protection to the artillery of a besieging force."

"In which direction is it situate?"

"Some three leagues to the south-east of Kemberg."

"Ah! and is there no other fortalice in the same neighbourhood?" asked Hamel, anxiously, as a sudden thought struck him.

"None," replied the old warrior.

"Tell me," exclaimed Charles, with increasing excitement, "is the main postern of Linsdorf Castle defended by a round battlemented tower whereon floats the Count's banner?"

"Thou art accurate in thy description. Hast ever visited the fortalice of the Count?"

Charles Hamel made no reply: he was now convinced it was in Linsdorf Castle that he had appeared before the tribunal of the Vehm; and his suspicion that Count Manfred's demand for the delivery of his person resulted from those proceedings, was consequently confirmed.

But he knew too much of the deeply-ramified power and influence of the Bloody League, as the Vehm was often called, to dare to utter a word concerning it: the very individual with whom he was walking might be a member of the terrible confederation; and the walls themselves would have ears to catch the slightest syllable which tended to betray the proceedings of the Vehm.

He, therefore, avoided a reply to the question of Dewitz; and, after a short interval of silence, during which he recovered his composure, he said, "Are there not many strange tales afloat relative to the proud Count of Linsdorf?"

"By the rood, I have heard many such!" ejaculated Dewitz, who detested the Count from the bottom of his honest heart. "I remember when he was but a poor officer in the imperial service; but that's many years ago."

"How long?" inquired Charles.

"Some eighteen or twenty years, young man," answered Dewitz. "The old Count of Linsdorf had two sons, Sigismund and Manfred. Sigismund was a fine, noble-hearted man; Manfred was always designing, crafty, and busy with intrigue. The old Count discarded Manfred—no one ever knew precisely why; but rumour did state that Manfred was detected in an attempt to poison his father and elder brother. Recollect, I do not tell you that such was really the case: I only report what rumour asserted. Manfred was discarded from the paternal dwelling: that much is positive. He was about thirty at the time; and he joined the imperial army. He and I were brother officers: but we never agreed. His crafty disposition did not suit a blunt soldier like me. In a short time after he entered the imperial service, his father died, and Sigismund succeeded to the title and estates. Count Sigismund was then about four-and-thirty, I have understood: he had been only lately married to a lovely young lady, the orphan daughter of noble parents, whose riches she inherited and brought her husband as a dowry. The union was blessed with a daughter; and the happiness of Count Sigismund and the Countess Ildegarda seemed complete. But the story now becomes sad, Messer Hamel; and methinks we had better change the discourse."

"I pray thee, proceed," exclaimed Charles; "I feel deeply interested in your narrative."

"I said that the happiness of the noble couple was complete," continued Dewitz, "because they were blessed with an heiress; for Linsdorf, like Rosenthal, is not exclusively a male fief. But that happiness was cut short as it were in a moment. One day Count Sigismund went out to the chase; and he never came home alive. He separated, in the ardour of the hunt, from his followers; and a few hours afterwards he was found murdered in the midst of a wild heath about two leagues from Linsdorf."

"And were not the assassins detected?" asked Hamel.

Dewitz did not immediately reply to this question; but, after the lapse of some moments, he said in a low, solemn tone, "The cord and dagger were found near the corpse!"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Hamel, a cold shudder passing over him. "And what became of the Countess and her infant daughter?"

"It was rumoured that the unhappy lady, rendered desperate by the untimely death of her beloved husband, put a voluntary termination to her sufferings; and, afraid perhaps to leave her child unprotected in a world whose sorrows she herself had so bitterly experienced, the wretched mother added murder to suicide!"

"I understand you," said Hamel, painfully affected by this narrative. "She would not allow her infant to survive her."

"So report stated. There were two splendid funerals, following closely upon each other; one coffin for the Count, and the second for the mother and her child. Thus was it that Manfred became Lord of Linsdorf some sixteen or seventeen years ago. But I must not waste my time in idle converse, good Messer Hamel: the sentinels should be duly posted, in case of a surprise."

Dewitz bade the young man good night; and Hamel, descending from the ramparts, crossed the courtyard towards the donjon in which his own private apartment was situate.

As he passed through a vestibule at the end of which was the principal staircase of that important part of the Castle, the sound of a plaintive female voice fell upon his ears.

He glanced around, and perceived a dim light shining through a half-open wicket belonging to a high and arched door on his right hand.

He was about to continue his way, when that plaintive voice suddenly burst into sobs and such dismal expressions of woe, that the young man considered himself bound to ascertain if his presence could impart aid in such an evident case of distress.

Pushing open the wicket, Charles crossed the threshold, and found himself in the chapel of the Castle.

Upon the altar at the farther end two wax-candles afforded a feeble light; and on the steps of the holy shrine a female was kneeling.

She had her back turned towards Hamel; and, her grief having somewhat subsided, she now appeared to be praying with the most heartfelt sincerity.

The young man drew near, and was struck by the exquisite symmetry of the figure on which his eyes were riveted.

"Blessed Virgin!" said the most sweetly soft and musical voice that had ever met his ears, "deign to shield from harm my beloved mistress—protect from injury her who never injured human being! Whithersoever foul treachery may have conveyed her, let thy goodness follow her!"

Again the prayer was interrupted by profound sobs.

Hamel remained motionless at a little distance, unwilling to retreat, and yet afraid to interrupt a sorrow which seemed too sacred to admit of intrusion.

In a few minutes the female rose from her suppliant position: and then a lovely countenance, with mild blue eyes, a rosy mouth, and damask cheeks, set off—not shaded—by long fair hair, was revealed to the gaze of the young man.

The beautiful creature started when she beheld Hamel standing at a short distance.

"Pardon this intrusion, fair one," said he, advancing towards her; "I heard a voice of mourning as I passed the door, and was induced to enter to ascertain the cause of distress."

"I was praying for the welfare of my beloved mistress, the Lady Theresa," answered Maria—for it was she.

"You are then deeply attached to her," said Charles, struck by the sweet manners as much as he had been by the personal appearance of the maiden.

"I have been brought up with her from my infancy," was the bashful reply; "and from her I have received naught but kindness. Oh!" she added, with animation, "I should be ungrateful indeed, did I not love her dearly—very dearly."

"May God restore her to you, fair maiden," exclaimed Charles, enthusiastically; "and if heaven may be moved by prayer in this instance, your intercessions will not fail to find favour with the Almighty."

"Methought that I found consolation in prayer, Messer Hamel," said Maria, casting down her eyes, into which fresh tears had started. "But, alas, I have heard so much evil of the Lord of Linsdorf, that I tremble for the safety of my beloved mistress."

"All that her father can do towards her rescue will be undertaken to-morrow," observed Hamel. "The reinforcements pour in; and, heaven willing! we may speedily deliver your lady from the hands of that false chieftain."

"My best prayers will accompany you, sir," said the damsel; then with a modest inclination of the head, she passed out of the chapel.

Her soft and bashful beauty made a powerful impression upon the young man; and his eyes followed her fairy form until she disappeared by the wicket.

He then withdrew from the chapel and sought his own apartment.

Throughout the greater portion of the night the fortalice was the scene of bustle and alacrity.

But while the inmates of Rosenthal were preparing for the expedition against Linsdorf Castle, a strange and mysterious being was bent upon delaying the march of the Baron's forces.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LINSDDRF CASTLE.

RETURN we now to the Lady Theresa, at the moment when the minions of the Count of Linsdorf burst into the donjon of Rosenthal Castle.

In a fainting state the heir of Rosenthal was hurried away between two powerful men, while several others, before and behind, covered the abduction against the few retainers of the Baron who were in a condition to make any resistance in that part of the castle.

Theresa was borne away—the western postern was passed, and she was placed upon a fleet steed which a page was holding on the opposite side of the moat.

Then, escorted, or rather guarded, by the men-at-arms who had first carried her off from the donjon, and whose horses were also in readiness for them, the hapless maiden was forced away from the paternal building.

Recovering her presence of mind, Theresa demanded whither her guards were conducting her.

"Thou wilt know shortly, lady," was the reply. "But fear not; no harm shall befall thee."

Theresa saw that it was useless to question her stern companions. She accordingly resigned herself in silence to the fate that might be in store for her.

Circumstances naturally led her to believe that this outrage upon her was perpetrated by the Lord of Linsdorf.

Nor was she mistaken.

In a short time the proud towers of that nobleman's feudal hold appeared above the trees; but Theresa's heart sank within her as the heavy hoofs of the steeds clattered upon the vibrating drawbridge.

The cavalcade passed into the spacious courtyard of Linsdorf.

One of the men-at-arms assisted the maiden to alight, and led the way in silence to a low door opening into one of the four towers which formed the angles of the quadrangular donjon or keep.

Up the narrow staircase to which the low door led was Theresa compelled to proceed, the vassal following her close, while his mailed boots clanked heavily on the stone steps.

Having ascended to a considerable height, they reached a landing, where the man knocked with the pommel of his sword at an arched door deeply set in a rudely-sculptured Gothic recess.

The door was opened by an old woman with one of those impassable countenances which defy the phrenologist—a countenance which neither denoted the absence or existence of passions within the breast—a countenance, in a word, which afforded not the slightest index to the disposition.

In attire and general appearance, the old woman seemed to be a domestic or dependent of a superior grade.

Such, indeed, was the fact, for she exercised the important functions of housekeeper or matron in the Castle of Linsdorf—a situation of considerable trust and privilege in the extensive establishment of a feudal lord, and where there was no lady to superintend the domestic economy of the household.

"Dame Winifred, I bring thee the guest whose presence was more than half promised thee when the expedition started this morning," said the man. "Thou art doubtless aware what befitting treatment to show a lady whom our lord loves."

The man bowed to Theresa, and slowly retraced his steps down the stairs.

"Walk in, young lady," said Dame Winifred.

Theresa followed the ancient matron into a spacious room, comfortably fitted up, and where a table was spread with many dainty viands, delicious fruits, and choice wines.

"You had better partake of some refreshment, lady," said the matron. "Whatever you require, speak, and I will endeavour to gratify your wishes."

"Tell me, good woman, why I am brought hither?" demanded Theresa, in an imploring tone.

"Nay, I am ready to serve you, but not to answer questions," replied Dame Winifred.

Theresa sank upon a seat, and gave way to the most gloomy apprehensions.

"That door," said the matron, after a long pause, "opens into a suite of apartments which you will please to call your own. I am not disposed to annoy you with more of my presence than you choose."

As she spoke, she pointed to a door facing the one by which Theresa had entered the room.

"I should wish to retire," said the young lady.

The matron lighted a lamp, and led the way into a suite of three apartments, the first fitted up as a sitting-room, the second as a bedchamber, and the third as an oratory.

The furniture was very old, and the rooms appeared as if they had not been occupied for many years. Indeed, it was evident that pains had been taken to dispel the gloom of their appearance, and adapt them for the reception of the lady on whose presence in his castle the Count of Linsdorf had reckoned with so much confidence. Flowers were arranged in vases upon the antique mantel; several ornaments of the latest fashion of the time were scattered about. The old tapestry had been hastily repaired in several places, and fires were burning in the sitting and bedrooms. Nevertheless, the aspect of the apartments—large and lofty, with narrow windows protected by bars, and smelling of damp as if they had been long shut up—struck additional gloom to the already sinking heart of the Lady Theresa.

The matron placed the lamp upon the table in the sitting-room, and said—

"I am to be found when you wish my services, lady, in my own chamber, which you have just seen. If the appearance of these apartments is not so cheerful as could be desired, you must excuse us on that account, for it was but at daybreak this morning that the Count resolved upon making you his guest, and I had little time for preparation. These are the only apartments in the castle at all fitted for the reception of one of your sex and rank, as his lordship is not accustomed to behold such fair faces within his walls. Hence his entire abode rather resembles one vast barrack than the tenements of a knight and noble peer."

Theresa made no reply to this lengthy explanation, or apology, and the matron withdrew into her own chamber, closing the door of Theresa's sitting-room behind her.

The moment the heiress of Rosenthal was alone she threw herself upon a seat, and burst into an agony of tears.

"For what destiny am I reserved?" she exclaimed, "and what will become of my dear father? His castle sacked—his vassals defeated—his proud spirit perhaps broken—and his daughter torn away from him! Oh! how full of terrible events has been this day!"

For a considerable time Theresa remained plunged in her sorrowful reverie.

At length she started up, for the idea of escape darted into her mind.

"Escape!" she murmured at the next moment; "silly maiden that I am! Will the fowler who has toiled so hard to snare a poor, weak bird leave the door of its cage open when once it is caught?"

Then again she wept.

"And yet," she thought, after another interval of soul-



harrowing meditation, "the most desperate and determined in their wicked purposes often neglect the most common precaution to ensure the final success of their schemes. When proud man closes one door, a merciful Providence opens another."

Inspired by this idea, catching at straws when immersed in the raging whirlpool, Theresa took the lamp in her hand, and proceeded to examine her apartments with wistful scrutiny.

There was nothing peculiar about the sitting-room beyond the general appearance which we have described already, save, perhaps, the fact that, on a closer inspection, Theresa found the tapestry and furniture to be far more antique than she had at first supposed, while the general aspect of the room showed that it could not have been tenanted for many, many years until then.

The furniture and appointments of the sitting and bedrooms must originally have been very handsome—indeed, most costly; but the velvet cushions of the chairs were faded, moth-eaten, and dusty; the woodwork was thickly dotted all over with those little holes, scarcely bigger than the pricks of pins, which insects and decay form in the strongest oak. The hangings of the spacious couch in the bedroom were falling to pieces, in spite of the hasty attempts made during the day to patch them together; and, when shaken, a cloud of dust was raised in the room.

The third apartment was the smallest of the suite, and was fitted up as an oratory, or chapel for private devotions. Upon a dais approached by three steps, stood an altar, the drapery of which was soiled with dust, and rendered as brittle as tinder by age. Four massive silver candlesticks were as black with age and neglect as if they were of bronze.

On one side of the oratory was the full-length portrait of a handsome man in the prime of life. The picture was covered with dust; but Theresa stepped upon a stool and shook it. She was then enabled to obtain a better view of the figure represented, which was as large as life. The portrait was that of a nobleman of high rank—a circumstance evinced by the attire.

On the opposite side of the oratory was the picture of a lovely female, in the full bloom of her youthful charms. Her dress bespoke her exalted station; and her face was clothed with an expression of ineffable softness and condescension.

Theresa was particularly struck with this charming countenance, which did not appear altogether unfamiliar to her. The light hair, the mild blue eyes, the delicate complexion, the pale, high forehead, and the sweet smile which the skill of the artist had literally represented as playing upon the mouth, formed an assemblage of charms that produced a strange and wonderful effect upon the young maiden.

In order to obtain a better view of a portrait that interested her so deeply as even to banish for a few minutes the sense of her own situation, Theresa placed the stool below it, and was enabled by these means to shake the canvas to rid it of the dust which had settled upon it, when, to her surprise and alarm, a door, whose existence she had not before perceived, flew open in the wainscot immediately beneath the picture. At the same time a violent gust of wind nearly extinguished her lamp.

Theresa started back in dismay, expecting to see someone emerge from the aperture thus strangely revealed; but not a soul appeared.

She then recovered her courage, and advanced to examine the door; when she perceived that it opened with a spring, which, being somewhat unsettled through age, had given way by the shaking of the wainscot against which the picture hung.

Theresa marked how the spring must be pressed in order to act; she then closed the door, and returned to her sitting-room, fearful that the matron might detect her in the midst of her investigations.

But as she placed the lamp upon the table she heard a slight noise at the farther end of the apartment, and casting a terrified glance in that direction, to her surprise she beheld him whose image was so deeply engraven in her heart.

Wilhelm Faust stood before her.

For a moment Theresa thought that she saw a spirit, and she fell back a few paces, with horror and alarm depicted upon her countenance.

"She dares not meet my looks—she feels all her perfidy!" murmured Faust, in a rapid and inaudible tone; then, advancing towards the maiden, he said, aloud, "Dost thou regret to see a friend so near thee, Theresa?"

"Oh! it is he—it is he!" she exclaimed, and, darting forward, she fell into his arms.

"Now thou art my own Theresa once again!" cried Faust, as he pressed his lips to hers.

"Wilhelm—dear Wilhelm," murmured the maiden, "how camest thou here? Are you, too, a prisoner?"

"Bars and bolts, Theresa, would scarcely impede my way," answered Faust, in a proud yet bitter tone.

"Oh! I know that you are brave and dauntless, Wilhelm!" exclaimed Theresa, not understanding the real meaning of those words. "But how came you here?"

"Ask no questions, Theresa—but listen to me," returned Faust, in a rapid tone. "We have not a moment to spare! In a few minutes the proud Count of Linsdorf will be here—here in this chamber!"

"Holy Virgin protect me!" exclaimed Theresa, clasping her hands together.

"Listen, I say," cried Faust, somewhat impatiently. "It is in my power to bear thee hence—"

"Then delay not, Wilhelm—delay not, I conjure you!" said Theresa, imploringly.

"Yes—I can deliver thee—bear thee hence—away from the power of the heartless noble who will force thee to espouse him if thou remainest here. But wilt thou be mine, Theresa—wilt thou fly with me whither I shall propose to conduct thee—afar from this neighbourhood where the will of your father opposes our love?"

"Wilhelm—is it possible? Do you impose conditions upon me in such an hour as this?" demanded Theresa, bursting into tears.

"I do—I do, Theresa—for I adore you!" cried Faust, again snatching her to his arms, and covering her with such glowing, burning kisses that the maiden withdrew herself, almost alarmed, from his embrace.

"I cannot abandon my father—not even for you, Wilhelm!" she faltered, her cheeks suffused with blushes.

"Then I cannot—will not deliver thee," exclaimed Faust, in an impassioned tone. "Be to me all—everything—mine wholly, solely—"

At this moment a loud voice was heard in the matron's apartment.

"The Count!" exclaimed Faust. "Theresa—wilt thou be mine? Speak—you have not an instant to deliberate!"

"Save me—save me, Wilhelm."

"I will—but swear that you will be mine."

"Oh! I cannot—dare not draw down upon myself my father's curse!" returned Theresa, painfully excited.

"Then I must leave thee now," said Faust, in a hoarse but rapid tone. "But fear not. I will visit thee again. Demand two days to consider the Count's proposals."

"He leaves—he abandons me!" murmurs Theresa.

And she fell upon her knees, with her hands clasped, and her head inclining upon her bosom.

"No, think of my proposal! To-morrow I will visit thee again."

These words fell distinctly upon the maiden's ears; but when she raised her head a moment afterwards, Faust had disappeared.

Almost at the same instant the door was thrown open, and the Count of Linsdorf entered the room.

A cloud sat on his brow, an angry smile was upon his thin lips, and his lean countenance was flushed with indignation.

"Maiden," he said, endeavouring to render his cold and harsh voice as conciliatory as possible, "wherefore on thy knees in my presence? Were I a courtly gallant it was for me to kneel to thee. But I am a man more acquainted with camps than the bowers of love, and who lack in gentleness of words I make up in generosity deeds. Rise, lady."

With those words he forced Theresa to rise from her suppliant posture, which he fancied that she had assumed on his entrance and on his account.

"What wouldst thou with me, my lord?" demanded the maiden, all the pride of the Rosenthals flashing her eye and animating her brow.

"Holy Virgin! A pretty question," cried the Count. "But I have no time to bandy idle words. To-morrow shalt thou accompany me a willing or unwilling bride to the altar—and I had rather it were the former."

"To-morrow, my lord," echoed Theresa. "Oh! consider how unprepared I am for such an announcement!"

"Did I think that delay would render thee favorable—" mused the Count, surveying the lady with admiration.

"Oh! hurry me not so rashly to a decision, my lord," cried Theresa, remembering the words of Faust. "Gra



me a little time—two short days—to reflect upon your proposal."

"Be it so, lady," said the Count, after a moment's pause.

He then abruptly left the room.

"My father!" murmured Theresa, as the door closed behind him. "He did not tell me of my father!"

And, overcome by her emotions, she fell upon a seat, and gave free scope to her poignant grief.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BROCKEN.

'Tis morning, and the sun appears above the eastern plains.

Rising from a flat and sandy country, the Brocken lifts its colossal summit to the sky.

That giant of the Harz, with its heart of granite and its sides abounding in silver, iron, and gold, gives birth to innumerable streams, which flow from it in all directions.

Here and there those waters fall in boisterous cascades amidst rude masses of granite, which the continuous action of the streams has separated and the tempest or the earthquake shaken down from the high surrounding rocks.

Nature is grand, and wild, and awe-inspiring in those solitudes.

From the summit of the Brocken naught higher save the heavens can be seen.

The eye is impeded by no obstacle, as it glances around; but fails to distinguish objects in the monotonous and unbroken distance.

Everywhere around is the horizon lost in a light blue obscurity.

Four thousand feet above the level of the sea is the highest peak of that mountain wilderness, and from its eminence the eye commands a circle of a hundred and fifty miles.

Within the horizons that constitute that line is comprised the two-hundredth part of Europe.

Europe commands not such another view!

Escaping from the huge piles of granite rock which the hand of Time has broken from their parent mass, the Ilsestein and the Oder wind their separate ways amid the plains that touch the foot of the Brocken.

And on those rivers' banks are green fields and shady woods, but on the heights that command them nature reigns in all its savage wildness.

There the human voice raises echoes of a fearful kind, which multiply until the whole mountain rings with a myriad articulate tones, as if legions of evil spirits were present to repeat the syllables of man.

Every cavern and every hollow seems armed with a metallic tongue, which sends forth its clamorous notes in answer to the signal that first awakes the echoes of the colossal hill.

The broken paths overhang precipitous depths, and wind beneath jutting cliffs. Danger above, and peril below.

The projecting boughs and the stunted shrubs menace the safety of those dreary roads, and from their dizzy heights the eye may plunge across yawning abysses, into wild ravines, where the torrent falls with deafening roar.

Unearthly sounds mingle with the din of the waters and the echoes of the hills, venomous reptiles hiss in the dank grass, the toad squats in the moist hollows near the streams, slow-worms of unusual length wind their slimy way along the sides of the paths, birds of ominous appearance flap their huge wings amidst the dark shade of the pines, snake-flowers, nettles, and noisome weeds twine into meshes to entangle the feet of the traveller.

Upon the highest point of the Brocken two forms were standing.

The arms of one were folded across his breast, and his eyes were turned, with a penetrating glance, upon his companion, who surveyed with awe the scene around him.

"Art thou still of the same mind, Faust?" demanded the Demon.

"I am," was the reply. "Have I not told thee that it suits my plans to prevent the march of the Rosenthal force?"

"I ask not to know thy designs," observed the Demon, with a sardonic smile. "All that I seek for is to execute thy will."

"My will is that thou dost devise a means to allow this

day to pass without an effort on the part of the Lord of Rosenthal to rescue his daughter."

"Canst thou not accomplish that by virtue of the power wherewith I have vested thee?" demanded the Demon, scornfully.

"True! With a breath I can destroy that gallant force—with a word I can deliver Theresa from her prison. But no power that thou hast given to me, and no power that thou dost possess, can enable me to direct at will the heart of a pure virgin. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied the Demon, and he smiled grimly.

"Then procure me that delay which will enable me to practise artifice," said Faust. "Why dost thou hesitate? Wherefore didst thou transport me hither, when ere now I signified my will to thee?"

"I brought thee hither, because it is here that I must work thy will," returned the Demon. "I hesitate, because the means that I must call to aid to effect thy purpose will carry desolation over that scene which thou may'st behold from hence—so peaceful, so tranquil beneath the soft light of the dawn."

"So that thou sheddest no blood—for I can do that by virtue of my own power—I care not for other consequences. Proceed."

Faust spoke in a decided and impatient tone. The sun was now above the horizon, and he feared lest the troops of Rosenthal should be already on the march.

"I will obey thee," said the Demon.

Then, turning his face towards the north, he extended his right hand, and chanted the following incantation—

"Wake, Spirit of the Storm! Come forth  
From the dark mansions of the north;  
Burst from the prisons where you rave  
In Greenland's ever ice-bound cave;  
Bring howling tempests from the shore  
Of bleak and wintry Labrador;  
Gather each chilling blast that blows  
Over the Pole's eternal snows;  
Gird thyself with the hail and sleet  
That on Spitzbergen's mountains beat;  
Muster the wild winds that surround  
Iceland's inhospitable ground;  
Collect the hurricanes that roam  
O'er the Siberian exile's home;  
Marshal the whirlwind's furious host  
On Nova Zembla's frozen coast;  
Dip your black plumage, as you ride  
O'er the maelstrom's boiling tide.  
Wake, Spirit of the Storm! Come forth  
From the dark mansions of the north!"

By a natural impulse Faust had turned his eyes towards the quarter to which the Demon addressed this fearful incantation.

By degrees, as the fiend spoke, the blue obscurity of the northern horizon—that obscurity on which the golden rays of morning were gradually pouring their effulgence from the east—became over-clouded: first a mist arose; then the mist grew more dense, until it grew into a cloud of ominous blackness.

"Thou didst not appeal to the thunder and lightning," said Faust, but little moved by the appearance of the northern horizon.

"Mortal," returned the Demon, his countenance assuming a sudden sternness that made Faust tremble, "the thunder and the lightning obey only Him whose name I dare not mention."

There was a short pause, during which Faust kept his eyes fixed upon the ground, for he was abashed—nay, alarmed by that solemn reply; while the countenance of the Demon was convulsed with the agony of ineffable reminiscences.

"Dost pause in thy work?" at length exclaimed Faust, raising his head, and looking once more towards the north.

"Dost thou command me to proceed?" demanded the fiend.

"I do," was the resolute answer.

"Then have thy will," said the Demon; and he concluded his incantation thus:—

"Hie, Spirit of the Storm! Go forth  
From the dark mansions of the north;  
Uproot the pine, and rend the rock,  
Shake tower and town with sudden shock;  
Level the tallest, stateliest trees  
That e'er coquetted with a breeze;  
Hurl from the giddy precipice  
The granite mass into th' abyss;

Sweep with thy desolating train  
Over the mountain and the plain;  
Scour the green meadow and the hill,  
To torrent swell the limpid rill;  
Scatter the harvest, tear the vine,  
Level the tomb, unroof the shrine.  
Hie, Spirit of the Storm! Go forth  
From the dark mansions of the north!"

By degrees, as the fiend spoke, the breeze from the north freshened, then it blew in one continued gust, gathering force as it swept along, until it was fraught with the terrific violence of the hurricane.

And now raged that appalling tempest which, in the year 1498, desolated the entire territory between the two streams of the Elbe, and the memorable narrative of which is preserved in the annals of Saxony.

From the height of the Brocken were beheld the ravages of that tremendous hurricane.

Huge masses of granite, which a thousand men with pulleys and levers would not have stirred in a week, were torn from their stay, and hurled down into the abyss beneath in an instant.

As they rolled down, bounding from rock to rock—tearing away the strongest pines as a child might scatter flowers—the echoes which they raised reverberated amidst the Harz mountains like the rapid discharge of numerous cannon.

Then, when they fell into the floods that boiled in the profundities beneath, they threw up the spray to tremendous height, as if a volcano had exploded in the caverns of the earth, and heaved up the bed of the torrents.

The eye rested for one moment on a knot of mighty pines; in the next they were gone; but the glance could follow them skimming along the sides of the mountains like things of no weight.

Colossal oaks were rent and hurried away with incredible speed, as if they were feathers upon the wings of the whirlwind.

The torrents boiled and foamed, and rushed onwards with a roaring and deafening din.

The earth seemed to shake to its very centre.

The Brocken appeared to totter upon its mighty base.

Terrific hurricane!

And far—far as the eye could reach from that eminence of four thousand feet, the ravages of the whirlwind were equally appalling.

Groves of pines were suddenly levelled as if a giant had cut them down with one blow of a mighty sickle.

Towns and villages were shaken; houses were blown down, and the strongest edifices were unroofed as easily as a child flings off with his finger the topmost card of his miniature structure.

The tempest overturned the watch-towers on the tops of the hills; levelled the cornfields, and made the vineyards a scene of desolation.

The tombs in the cemeteries were hurled in shapeless masses upon the graves whose inmates they commemorated. The bells in the church steeples rang the dismal tocsin of their own accord.

The chapels by the wayside were split asunder, and the sacred ornaments of the shrines scattered hither and thither.

For six hours did this appalling tempest endure.

But the thunder rolled not, neither did the lightning flash.

The wind, the raging wind, worked all that mischief, for in the intervals of its fury, the sleet and hail which it bore upon its wings, added to the desolation, spoiling the grain that was levelled, and cutting to pieces the vines that had been beaten down.

But the moment that the hurricane commenced, Faust had disappeared from the summit of the Brocken.

There, however, the Demon remained, calmly surveying the progress of the whirlwind.

Towering above the ruin he had worked, he seemed the prince of evil, giving encouragement by his presence to the mad elements that raged at his commands.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MYSTERIES OF LINDSOLF CASTLE.

THE Lady Theresa awoke at an early hour, before the appalling tempest began.

For a few instants she could scarcely believe that the incidents of the preceding day were more than the prominent features of a disagreeable dream.

But when she cast her eyes around, and beheld that moth-eaten tapestry, and those antique articles of furniture—when she recalled to mind her mysterious interview with Faust, and the visit of the haughty Count of Lindsolf—she became fully aware of the sad reality of her position.

The idea of her own danger was associated with the most appalling uncertainty in respect to the fate of her father; and thus the hapless maiden had enough upon her mind to overwhelm her with despair.

In order to divert her thoughts from the contemplation of these disagreeable subjects, Theresa rose from her couch, and hastily performed the duties of the toilet.

But even while she was thus engaged, various perplexing sentiments agitated her bosom.

"In two days," she thought, "I am to announce my decision to the Lord of Lindsolf! Wilhelm promised to see me again; but how can he obtain admittance hither unless he be leagued with my enemies? Oh! yes—he can scarcely love me with that pure and holy devotion which he once showed towards me; or how would he wish to impose conditions upon me in the hour of my bitter anguish and deep distress?"

Then the maiden wept.

Scarcely had she completed her toilet, when Dame Winifred entered the bedroom, and announced that the morning's repast was served in the adjacent apartment.

In the meantime that terrific storm, whose ravages we narrated in the preceding chapter, had commenced; and so loud was the warring of the wind—so boisterous the howling of the hurricane—that it drowned all other sounds throughout the castle.

So thick, however, were the walls of the donjon of Lindsolf, that the din of the raging element was mitigated in a considerable degree.

Still Dame Winifred was compelled to repeat her announcement that the repast was prepared, before it met Theresa's ears.

Theresa followed her in silence, and took her seat at the table, which was covered with dainties of that solid description which constituted a breakfast in those times. The young lady, however, ate but sparingly; her heart was so full!

"Thou dost not do justice to the viands which our maniple has provided for thy table, lady," said Winifred. "Perchance my presence is disagreeable to you; and yet I did but intrude myself on you for the purpose of keeping you company. Or haply this terrific tempest appals thee?"

"Are you surprised that I should be unhappy?" demanded Theresa, "when I have been snatched away from my home, and imprisoned in a strange fortress?"

"The lord of which loves you to distraction," rejoined Dame Winifred. "Foolish maiden that you are—to refuse the hand of one who is so generous, so brave, and so wealthy! But, if report speak truly, a humble student of Wittenberg has found more favour in thy sight—"

"Good woman," exclaimed Theresa, hastily, "know you that same young student to whom you allude?"

"By name only, lady," answered Winifred. "I have nevertheless had a fair report of his comeliness. But, holy Virgin! how the storm rages!"

"And you have never seen him?" asked Theresa, musingly.

"What excitement about a poor student!" exclaimed Dame Winifred. "No—lady: I know him not," she added, more calmly. "I seldom stir abroad; years have elapsed since I last visited Wittenberg; and I am not very likely to see the youth in this castle."

Theresa held down her head, and reflected profoundly upon this assurance.

"Did any stranger visit your apartment last evening, a short time prior to the arrival of the Count your master?" demanded Theresa, after a long pause.

"Assuredly not," replied the matron. "But what strange vagaries are passing in your imagination, fair one?"

"One question more," said Theresa: "are there two means of egress from this apartment on the side of your own chamber, good dame?"

"Again I answer thee with a denial, lady," returned the matron, surveying Theresa with attention. "You have been troubled with dreams, my sweet bird: your student has haunted you;—but I would advise you to expel him from your memory, and think only of the Lord of Lindsolf."

"I ask thee not for counsel," said Theresa, haughtily.

"Wouldst thou serve me, I will put thy good will to the test."

"In which manner, lady?"

"I would inquire of you for news of my father," said Theresa. "What was the issue of that dreadful combat of yesterday?"

"If it will in any way compose your mind to know the truth," answered the matron, "I—"

"Oh! it will—it will," cried the young lady. "I could endure imprisonment with resignation, did I know that my poor father was safe!"

"He is safe," said Dame Winifred: "his lordship my master withdrew his forces the moment the principal object of his attack was accomplished."

The old woman did not choose to acquaint Theresa with the strange and mysterious manner in which the vassals of Linsdorf had been repulsed from the ramparts of Rosenthal.

"Then my father is safe in his own halls!" exclaimed Theresa, clasping her hands together; and in a whisper she murmured, "He will not leave me in the power of this daring Count!"

"Trust not to your father's means to rescue you from hence, lady," said Winifred, who saw what was passing in her mind. "His forces are shattered, his power crippled; and he will rather consent to peace on condition that you espouse the Count of Linsdorf, than renew the feudal strife with the hope of wresting you from my master's power."

Theresa made no reply: she knew the inutility of provoking a discussion upon that point: and she moreover felt anxious to seek the solitude of her bed-chamber, in order to reflect and meditate upon her position without restraint. The old woman did not attempt to retain her; for the truth was that Dame Winifred was growing more and more alarmed at that appalling tempest which raged so furiously without; and she was anxious to betake herself to the chapel of the castle in order to put up prayers for her safety.

Theresa rose from her seat at the table in her sitting-room, and repaired to the adjoining chamber.

There, however, she soon grew weary of pondering over her own misfortunes; and she was suddenly seized with an invincible desire to contemplate once more that female portrait in the oratory which had so excited her attention on the preceding evening.

Having secured the lock of her bed-chamber door, in order to prevent the old matron from intruding upon her, she entered the oratory.

The moment she crossed the threshold, it seemed to her as if the mild and benignant countenance of the lady in the picture smiled upon her. Of course this was only fancy; but the effect produced by the momentary idea, in her mind, was one of respect mingled with awe.

As Theresa stood gazing up at the picture, she gradually associated the features and expression of the portrait with the countenance of her own dependant Maria, until she became overwhelmed with surprise at the wonderful resemblance which existed between them, and was not a little astonished that the circumstance should have failed to strike her on the preceding evening. This can, however, scarcely be wondered at, when we remember the state of her mind on that occasion, and the different effects produced by the portrait when seen by the artificial light of a dim lamp and the natural lustre of the broad day.

"Strange—most strange!" thought Theresa, as she surveyed the portrait; "and yet the resemblance is perfect! The same eyes—the same hair—the same sweet expression of the lips—the same graceful neck. Yet what can there be in common between the poor peasant's orphan Maria, and the high-born lady whose portrait is before me?"

From the picture Theresa's eyes wandered to the wainscot beneath; and she felt a powerful curiosity to carry her investigation of that part of the spacious castle farther than the oratory.

The tempest continued to rage with such desperate fury without, that it added to the gloom which filled her mind; and she longed for some motive of bustle and excitement to divert her thoughts from the dispiriting topics on which they settled the moment she gave way to them.

She apprehended no danger from the whirlwind, well aware that the thickness of the walls would defy its rage; but from time to time she was startled by the loud crash of huge stones or tiles dislodged from the roofs and hurled violently into the court below.

Longing to be enabled to avert her attention from the various sources of discouragement which surrounded her,

she sought an occupation of some kind; and, in the absence of her usual companions and her embroidery, she gladly obeyed the curiosity which now prompted her.

Accordingly, with but little hesitation, her finger pressed the secret spring; and the mysterious door instantly flew open.

For an instant Theresa experienced a sensation of alarm; but, well aware that old feudal strongholds frequently contained secret doors and private modes of communication between the various suites of rooms, she speedily recovered her presence of mind.

The door that now stood open before her, revealed to her eyes a passage that was lighted by several loopholes, thus proving that it ran along the wall of that part of the building.

She entered the passage, or corridor, which was almost twenty feet in length, and perceived a door at the farther end. Towards this she advanced, and listened. Not a sound emanated from within. She placed her hand upon the latch; the door was locked; but even the gentle pressure which it received from the maiden as she thus tried it, caused it to burst open. The wood-work in which the bolt of the lock fitted had yielded through decay, arising from age and damp.

Theresa now found herself in a small chamber, fitted up as a bed-room, but with the furniture so decayed, the hangings so moth-eaten, and the whole place so dusty, as to present indubitable signs of having remained neglected and forsaken for many, many years.

But what seemed most remarkable to the young lady, was a certain appearance which indicated that the chamber had never been set to rights since the last tenant had left it.

The bed-clothes, all tattered with age and discoloured with dust, were turned down, as the person who last slept in that couch had left them; and the vestiges of a repast were upon the table. There were the remains of the napkin, torn and soiled,—the knives and forks, covered with rust,—the earthenware plates and dishes, black with dust,—the flagon and drinking-horn clothed in cobwebs.

Years—many years must have passed since that bed had been pressed by a living form, and since that repast was served up!

There was something awe-inspiring in the contemplation of those traces of the last tenant of that secluded room!

And when the eye of Theresa beheld the window defended with massive bars, and the prospect impeded by a wooden shade projecting from the ledge outside to a height of more than half way up the window, so that no one could be seen from without, and no one within could catch a glimpse of the scene beyond that cruelly-contracted barrier to the view,—when she reflected upon the mysterious approach to that chamber, and thought that the existence of the room itself might be unsuspected by those who were not well acquainted with that part of the castle,—she could not help thinking that the chamber had been originally devised as a secret prison, and perhaps last used as such!

She shuddered when she reflected that some persecuted being had haply passed nights of apprehension, terror, and despair in that bed, and had sat down in sorrow to the solitary meal whose vestiges were upon that table!

Theresa felt a sensation of terror and apprehension stealing over her, as she surveyed the mysteries of that oubliette; and she turned to leave the ominous place, when her eyes fell upon the half-open door of a cupboard formed in the thickness of the wall near the foot of the bed.

Conquering her apprehensions, and actuated by the feeling which rendered everything an object of curiosity in that strange room, Theresa approached the cupboard. On a close examination she perceived the tattered, moth-eaten, and blackened remains of several articles of female raiment upon the shelves.

"It was, then, one of my own sex who last occupied this chamber!" said Theresa within herself. "Poor woman! everything here convinces me that she was a prisoner. Perhaps, too, she was unfairly dealt with; perhaps that meal was the last she ever tasted!"

As this idea flashed through her mind, one of the loudest and most appalling gusts which characterized the tempest, swept over the castle; and the banner-staff upon the summit of the donjon snapped in halves with a loud din.

Theresa felt her heart for a moment sink within her; and she was about to turn with horror from the room.

But an irresistible feeling of interest,—a sentiment far superior to mere vulgar curiosity,—prompted her to exercise all possible command over herself, and inspect that cupboard more closely still.

As her glance plunged into its depths, she perceived an object which resembled a roll of paper, although covered with dust and enveloped in cobwebs.

She drew it forth: her conjecture in respect to its nature was not incorrect. It was a small roll of paper, tied round with a piece of string. The exterior leaves were soiled with dust, and the edges were eaten away with damp and age. Theresa shook the dust from the roll with great care, and ascertained that there was writing upon the inner sheets. She was about to remove the string, when she remembered that she had been absent a considerable time from her apartments, and that the matron might have sought admittance for some purpose or another.

She accordingly resolved to postpone any farther examination of the papers until a more convenient opportunity.

Being, however, by no means anxious to return to that room, she conveyed the manuscript into the oratory, where she concealed it in a secure place.

She then repaired to her bedchamber, unlocked the door, and entered the sitting-room.

In the meantime that appalling tempest continued to rage with unabated fury.

The sentinels were compelled to leave the ramparts; the light falconets, or small cannon, upon the walls were overturned.

The banner-staff was broken in twain, as ere now stated; and the flag itself was rent to shreds and scattered far and wide.

"Holy Virgin! defend the poor cottagers!" murmured Lady Theresa, devoutly crossing herself: "alas! fearful will be the results of this hurricane. Those who dwell in castles and strongholds need not fear; but the humble inhabitant of the frail hut—the tenant of the little cot—the poor villager—Oh! how will they suffer!"

Lady Theresa's reverie was interrupted by a low knock at the door; and Faust entered the apartment.

## CHAPTER IX.

### EXPLANATIONS.

"WILHELM!" ejaculated Theresa, flying towards him as if he were her guardian angel: "thou has kept thy word!"

"Have you then thought of me, Theresa? have you looked forward to my coming?" he asked, as he embraced her with unfeigned ardour.

"Can you doubt it, Wilhelm?" said the maiden, half-reproachfully. "Since first we met, when have I ever ceased to think of you?"

"Didst thou not forget the poor student, Theresa," asked Faust, fixing his eyes upon her as if to read her soul, "when he was immersed in a horrible dungeon?"

"Never—never—not for a single moment!" exclaimed Theresa, enthusiastically. "I was told that you had fled from Wittenberg with some low-born maiden—that reckless extravagances had plunged you into an inextricable labyrinth of debts—that you had even committed meanesses and frauds towards your college friends, to replenish your purse;—all this I heard—all this was told to estrange my heart from you:—but, no—no—I loved you, and believed you true, faithful, and honourable still."

"Ah! Theresa—if this were true——"

"True!" echoed the young maiden; "and wherefore should you doubt my word? Have I ever deceived thee, Wilhelm? have I ever given thee reason to suspect the sincerity of my love?"

"Theresa—Theresa," exclaimed Faust, in a tone of reproach; "that portrait which thou hast been accustomed to contemplate so fondly——"

"The portrait!" cried the lady, "what! dost thou know that?"

"I know all, Theresa," answered Faust. "I know that, when alone in thy chamber, thou hast gazed upon that portrait with eyes expressive of such deep, such profound affection, that if the inanimate countenance could but have received one particle of transfusion from your spirit, it would have smiled—it would have wept—through joy—through ineffable happiness!"

"And am I to be reproached for that—when thou wast away?" said Theresa, contemplating her lover with almost wild astonishment.

"Oh! you thought me false—you fancied me ruined in fame, and beggared in fortunes!" exclaimed the young man: then, drawing himself up with an air of pride and triumph, he said, "But if you require a lover who can deck thee with the costliest gems of the universe—who can call forth from the far-off mines the most precious stones to form baubles to enhance thy beauty;—if you seek to be adored by one who can bear thee away to lordly halls, where countless domestics shall be ready at thy nod; if you court pomp, splendour, rank, wealth, and homage,—speak, Theresa—speak—for I can gratify the wildest dreams of mortal ambition, and fulfil the fondest hopes of human vanity!"

As Faust spoke, his countenance became animated with a warm glow, and his eyes were fired with refulgent lustre: he seemed a prince at whose slightest word treasures were poured forth and courtiers ready to bow the knee;—every syllable he uttered denoted conscious superiority and unbounded capacity.

Theresa was alarmed.

For a moment she feared lest his reason had deserted him; but there was a firmness and a consistency in his words which forbade that idea, and filled her with indescribable astonishment.

"You speak as if you thought me selfish, ambitious, and vain, Wilhelm," said Theresa. "Oh! how are you mistaken! Whoever you may be—whatever you are,—under however deep a disguise you may have hitherto veiled yourself,—remember that I only knew you as the poor and humble student. And this can be no reproach, since you are neither poor nor humble; but it ought to give thee every confidence in me! I bestowed my heart upon you, without asking who you might be—thinking that I already knew who and what you were!"

"And when I was plunged into a dungeon,—incarcerated upon the most shallow and wretched pretences," continued Faust,—"pretences whose nature and whose author I will not now reveal to you,—then—then, Theresa, you forgot him whom you believed to be, and who really was at that period, the poor and humble student!"

"Why reproach me—why insult me thus!" demanded the heiress of Rosenthal.

"Didst thou not admit ere now that thine eyes were often bent over that portrait——"

"I said so, and I blush not to repeat the avowal," interrupted Theresa. "If there were aught unmaidenly—ought indiscreet in my conduct, the reproach should not come from your lips."

"From my lips!" repeated Faust, sorrowfully. "From whose lips, then, should such reproach come? Happily, from the rival who at this moment little thinks that I am here with thee!"

"A rival!" murmured Theresa.

"Yes," exclaimed Faust: "he whose portrait forms the topic of our discourse!"

"Oh, this is too much!" cried Theresa, bursting into tears. "Did true lover ever complain till now that his portrait was his own rival!"

"Miserable subterfuge!" thundered Faust, his lips growing white with rage. "How camest thou by a portrait of me, false one?"

"Sir, if I condescend to inform you," said Theresa, her maiden dignity, which was now so deeply offended, enabling her to command her emotions to such a degree as to reply to her lover with calmness and resolution,— "if I condescend to inform you, it is simply because I would not lie under an unjust imputation from any living being. Hadst thou not an associate at the University, named Otto Pianalla?"

"Yes; how does his name serve thy purpose?" cried Faust. "I am well aware that his sister is one of thy serving-women. 'Twas through that circumstance you and I first knew each other."

"Are you ignorant that Pianalla is an artist of high merit?" continued Theresa: "and is there aught extraordinary in the fact that I should desire his sister Ida to obtain from him, in secret, a portrait of thee?"

"Theresa!" ejaculated Faust; "thou knowest not how deeply all this touches me! Answer me, as thou wouldst answer to thy——"

"As I would answer to my God!" added Theresa, composedly.

"No—not thus," exclaimed Faust, with a species of inward shudder: "as thou wouldst answer to thy father, did he adjure thee on his death-bed—hast thou spoken truly?"

"Wilhelm, all the love I bear for thee will not permit me to endure this insult," said Theresa.

"And that portrait—where is it?" cried Faust, most unnaturally excited.

"It is here," said Theresa, drawing the miniature from her bosom: "it never leaves me!"

Faust cast one glance upon it, and his countenance became immediately convulsed with horror.

"I have been deceived—deceived—basely deceived," he murmured, in a hollow tone: "but, oh! to what has that deception led?"

"You have been deceived, dear Wilhelm," said Theresa: "those who made thee suspicious of my constant affection, deluded—basely deluded you."

"I comprehend it all, Theresa," answered Faust, endeavouring to conquer his terrible emotions. "Oh, had I known that you possessed a portrait of me all this would not have happened."

"You alarm me, Wilhelm—your manner is so wild. And now tell me what signifies those words which ere now bespoke you great and powerful? and, moreover, relieve my suspense by telling me how you obtain admittance hither?"

"Theresa," replied Faust, now speaking with singular volubility, "this is no time nor place for such explanations. Thou lovest me—thou hast never ceased to love me—"

"Never—never, for a single moment!" exclaimed the young lady in an impassioned tone.

"Then I will trust all to thy generous—thine affectionate heart," cried Faust. "I will not attempt to impose conditions upon thee: *thine attachment to me will make thee mine*," he murmured in a low tone: then, again speaking in an audible voice, he said, "I will save thee from this prison, Theresa—for it is a prison to thee: I will save thee—for I have the power. At midnight be prepared to leave the Castle of Linsdorf, and to return to thy father."

"Generous Wilhelm! thou art all my fond heart ever loved to fancy thee!" said Theresa, yielding her cheek to his rapturous kiss.

"At midnight, Theresa—at midnight," exclaimed Faust, "I will be here!"

"He then hurried from the apartment by the door opening into the matron's room, through which he passed, Dame Winifred being still occupied with her devotions in the chapel.

"At midnight he will be here!" thought the maiden, her bosom swelling with emotions of joy and anxiety; "and I shall be restored to my father! But how does he thus easily traverse the interior of Linsdorf Castle?"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE MANUSCRIPT.

THE storm still continued to rage with appalling fury; and shortly after mid-day Dame Winifred returned to her apartment, having prayed sufficiently, in her own estimation, to avert danger at least from herself, if not from the other inmates of the Castle of Linsdorf.

The noon meal was served up; and as soon as it was over the matron hurried back to the chapel.

Theresa retired to her bed-chamber, the door of which she carefully locked; for now that her mind was to a considerable degree tranquillized by the promise of deliverance made to her by her lover, she determined to while away the time by the inspection of the manuscript which had come into her possession in so strange a manner.

She accordingly fetched it from the place where she had concealed it in the oratory; and seating herself in her chamber, proceeded to examine the roll of papers.

We have before said that it was injured by the dust and damp, as well as by the ravages of time. Nevertheless, Theresa was enabled to decipher many passages of the writing, which was in an elegant female hand.

We place on record those fragmentary portions of the manuscript which were sufficiently preserved to be legible; and we need scarcely say it was with the greatest interest that the young maiden perused those isolated passages, which left such fearfully mysterious blanks for her imagination to fill up:—

### THE MANUSCRIPT.

blackest treachery which ever mortal could conceive! But to be immured in this awful solitude, with such dread uncertainty relative to the fate that may be reserved for me—oh! this is terrible—terrible! What can he mean to do with me? Does he intend to murder me in cold blood? That can scarcely be

—else why would he allow me to have existed a single day, when I was so completely in his power? And now six long and dreary weeks have I passed in this dungeon—for it is nothing else—trembling every time a step advances in that passage, shuddering whenever the door opens. Oh! to be suddenly snatched from so much happiness and plunged into so much misery is enough to drive one mad. And there are times when my brain seems to whirl—when my eyes behold unearthly, unnatural sights—when strange noises ring in my ears. How long will this last? What fate is in reality reserved for me? Have I lost all that could make earth tolerable to me? Is nothing left? Holy Virgin! when

cord and dagger, terrific emblem of his death! Then how well could I divine who ordered the blow to be struck, even if he did not inflict it with his own vile hand. But to snatch from me my child—to tear my beloved daughter from my bosom—ah! that was too cruel! And I who have never injured any one! No—never was I presuming or proud on account of the high rank which I enjoyed, or the wealth by which I was surrounded. I who would visit the humblest cottage where poverty required succour, grief needed consolation, or sickness demanded aid. I who studied how to render all those around me happy, and who was beloved by all the dependents of my noble-hearted husband. I who

beloved child, shall I ever see thee more? Oh! if my persecutor would only permit me to retire into some humble cot, I should end my days in peace, so that thou wast restored to me! But that interview of this morning—what hope does it leave me? Now his fearful projects are revealed in all their blackness—now I comprehend but too well why he has permitted me to live! And to tell me with such demoniac calmness that the world believes me dead, and that there is no hope for me on this side of the tomb, unless I consent to smile upon him even as I did on the beloved one whom he has murdered!

But what does he propose? Did my ears hear aright? That his interests demanded my total exclusion from that world which believes me to be dead, but that my child should be restored to me, and my condition improved in every respect save the enjoyment of liberty, if I would disgrace myself—disgrace my husband's name—disgrace my innocent child—by submitting to his odious addresses! Can it be possible that he was bold enough to appear in my presence? Was it really true that he could find words to frame his hateful, his dishonouring proposal? And then with what horrible effrontery did he offer to save my feelings by allowing the chaplain—a creature of his own—to read the marriage ceremony in the oratory adjoining this dungeon!

But how his lips quivered with rage, how his eyes flashed fire, when I spurned his advances, and upbraided him for his crimes. I cannot expect his forbearance after this; no, I feel that I must prepare for death. Every time that a step approaches, I must breathe a prayer to heaven to receive my soul in the abode of eternal mercy, for the next moment may be my last! And were it not for thee, my dear little daughter, how gladly I would meet death! I would even court it.

But so long as the duration of life permits the indulgence in a hope that I may see thee again—that Providence may restore thee to me—so long must I cling to existence. And that there is a faint hope of such a blissful event I am inclined to believe. That man Hugo, who brings me my meals, and who has so far taken compassion on me as to provide me the means of thus placing my thoughts on record, in spite of the positive commands of his cruel master to the contrary—that man's heart has already been softened in my behalf; and who knows that I may not move him by my tears, and by my promises of great reward, to connive at my escape? Yet I am wrong thus to cherish a hope which may never be fulfilled!

I again threw myself at Hugo's feet. I implored—I entreated—I menaced. He remains inexorable. Still he wept when he saw me at his feet, and when I spoke in such agonizing terms of my child. Perhaps he is himself a father; if so, he must have felt for me who am a mother. But I dislike his moody silence: those shakes of the head with which he discourages my queries are full of dread import. What could he mean by pointing towards the passage, and interrupting me with a frown, when I was about to repeat my thanks to him for having supplied me with this paper to which I commit my wild and disjointed thoughts? Oh! I understand: he is not altogether trusted; he is watched—some one waits at

the other end of the passage when he comes to my room. Yes—this must be the reason of his silence and his strange motions. Perhaps, then, he would assist me to escape, were he not thus watched; perhaps he will seek an opportunity to come and speak to me alone? This new idea consoles me. Why is it that the bitterness of my grief is somewhat mitigated, why is it that the acuteness of my anguish is to some extent soothed, when I thus place my hopes and fears on record? In a word, why should I write these lines at all? Alas! should I indeed perish by the command or by the hand of him who has already done me such deep and irreparable wrong, haply this short narrative of my wrongs will be permitted to remain unmolested in the place where I conceal it each time that a step approaches. Haply it will some day meet the eyes of those who may at least avenge me, should I be no more! Alas! how changed must be my heart from what it once was when I can think of vengeance! And yet—to be plunged from the pinnacle of human happiness into the depths of ineffable woe—oh! human nature could not support these bitter, bitter wrongs without a feeling of deadly rancour towards him who has caused them.

And another day has passed! But how did I tremble when that horrible man again visited me this afternoon, and renewed his odious proposals. "What!" I exclaimed, as I felt my cheeks flushing with the glow of indescribable indignation; "do you imagine me vile and base enough to join my hand to yours at the altar of God—your hand which is red with the blood of my husband!"—"Rash woman!" he cried; "you know not how terrible will be my vengeance if you thus receive my honourable addresses with disdain. Your husband died by virtue of the decree of a competent tribunal: he had offended against the laws of the Holy Vehm; and he perished."—"Wretch!" I exclaimed; "did the Holy Vehm pursue its usual course? Did it summons my husband to appear at the court of some Free Count, either in his castle-hall or beneath the lime tree on the hill top, according to established usage?"—"I came not hither to bandy words with you," he answered; "I am here to propose to thee the conditions on which thou mayst have thy daughter restored to thee and enjoy life."—"Life!" I exclaimed; "how could existence have any charm for me, when he whom I loved so tenderly is no more, and while I am a prisoner in this odious dungeon?"—"I give you three days to reflect upon my proposal," he said. "Beware how you trifle with me when I come again!" And then he went away.

Hugo came; and his countenance denoted more sympathy than he had ever before shown towards me. Again I threw myself at his feet, and implored his aid to release me from this horrible place.

He said, in a low tone, "Lady, I pity you. I have already proved how deeply I feel for you. But I am not altogether trusted myself, although my master considers me to be amongst the most faithful of his followers. I am watched by another; and it was with the greatest difficulty that I could contrive to come to you alone on this occasion."—"And my child, Hugo?" I exclaimed.—"Your child, lady, is safe and well. She is entrusted to

It only, then, now remains for me to hope that this record of my wrongs will some day meet the eyes of those who, through my attachment to my husband's name, or from love of justice and abhorrence of crime, will avenge us both! From what Hugo assured me, it is certain that my little daughter will be spared. Perhaps the monster, who hesitates not to imbrue his hands in the blood of persons that are grown up, trembles at the idea of assassinating an infant. May God grant that my darling child may one day recover her just rights!

The fear of death will not induce me to consent to the proposals of my mortal enemy—my husband's murderer—my persecutor! No; in a few hours he will be here to know my decision; and then I must prepare for death. Everything is ominous to-day. Hugo has been displaced by another; and that other—oh, how dark and forbidding is his countenance! Not a word would he utter to my courteous observations. And then, again, the little bird which hitherto has every morning perched upon the ledge of that huge wooden shade which bars the prospect from the window—even that little creature seems to shun this place with horror now! Alas! the lines which my feverish hand traces upon this paper, that is moist with my tears, are perhaps the last outpourings of that anguish

which has already lasted for two long months, but which is now so near its termination! At the commencement of this narrative, when I related the entire history of those fearful events, which

The remainder of the manuscript was totally illegible; but only another leaf seemed to have ever been written on beyond the last break; and the lines upon that page were completely obliterated by age.

"Poor creature!" thought Theresa; "how deeply she appears to have suffered! And yet, perhaps, the manuscript may only be a portion of a romance! It speaks of an entire history of certain frightful events which are often alluded to; but that portion is the commencement, which is obliterated. Alas! if this indeed be the true picture of sufferings actually endured, how sad must have been the condition of the unhappy lady—how cruel the conduct of her persecutor!"

Then, as Lady Theresa fell into a train of profound reflection relative to the manuscript, she recalled to mind the history of the Count of Linsdorf which had been related to her when she was young.

By degrees her imagination associated the narrative whose outlines she had gathered from the manuscript fragments with the history of the Count. The writer of that manuscript struck her to be the Countess Ildegarda; her husband who had been murdered by the Holy Vehm was the noble-hearted Sigismund, whose good qualities were yet remembered and recounted by the older inhabitants of the district; and the persecutor of the noble lady could be none other than the present Count.

Such was the connected narrative which arranged itself in Theresa's imagination.

And if the character of Count Manfred of Linsdorf had before appeared hateful to the gentle maiden, it now seemed literally appalling to her; and her pure soul revolted from the mere reminiscence that she had been compelled to listen to the proposals of a man whose soul, she felt convinced, was stained with the most appalling crimes.

It was, therefore, if possible, with increased anxiety that she looked forward to the hour when Faust had promised to liberate her.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MIDNIGHT.

The deep, sonorous tone of the castle bell proclaimed midnight.

Theresa was awaiting Faust's arrival in the most painful suspense.

The lamp was already flickering, for the wick had burnt down to its socket.

But scarcely had the bell ceased to ring the signal for the change of the sentinels around the walls when the door opened, and Faust entered the room.

"Theresa, I have kept my word," he said.

"Oh! I knew that you would come, dearest Wilhelm," returned the maiden. "But how can you effect my escape? By what means do you thus easily traverse the guarded castle? Tell me, Wilhelm—for, though I may seem foolish in your eyes, my mind is oppressed with strange, and yet indescribable ideas when I reflect upon the subject."

"Theresa, I have bribed the guards heavily," answered Faust, in a hurried tone; "and the old matron sleeps soundly. Come!"

The young lady hesitated not to accompany her lover, whose explanation seemed perfectly natural, and was, at all events, satisfactory.

He took his cloak from his shoulders, and bade Theresa envelope herself in its ample folds.

She obeyed him, and did not forget the manuscript, which she had carefully rolled up in her kerchief.

"I am ready," she said.

"I will lead the way," returned Faust. "Follow me fearlessly: no one will dare to stop you."

The manner in which these words were uttered imparted confidence to the mind of the maiden.

They passed through the matron's room; the old woman slept profoundly.

On the landing outside a man-at-arms was posted, with his halberd in his hand.

Theresa drew back instinctively; but Faust seized her by the hand, laid his finger upon his lip, and led her towards the stairs.

The man-at-arms retained his station, without appear-



ing to notice that any one was passing him; and then it struck Theresa that she could neither hear the sounds of the footsteps, nor even the rustling of the garments of herself or her lover.

All was as silent as death!

This strange circumstance suddenly filled her mind with apprehensions of that vague and indescribable nature which she had ere now alluded to in her conversation with Faust; and she felt as if she were about to faint.

But Faust cast upon her, by the light of the lamp which burnt upon the landing, a glance of such confidence and encouragement, that she felt ashamed of her weakness, and pursued her way with him down the narrow staircase.

The door at the bottom yielded to the hand of her lover, and he carefully closed it behind them.

They were now in the court-yard.

Battlement, donjon, tower, and turret were all brought out in strong relief against the deep, colourless sky, by the light of the lovely moon, for a delicious night had succeeded the awful tempest of the day.

They traversed the court as noiselessly as if they were spectres, and reached the gate, the folding doors of which were fast barred and chained.

In a moment Faust removed the bolts and heavy links of iron which seemed to impede their progress; and as he did this, the bolts grated not, neither did the chains clank.

Moreover, the two men-at-arms who kept guard at the gate continued their discourse as calmly, and in a manner so completely unembarrassed as if no one were near them, and no one overheard them.

Again Theresa's heart was oppressed with vague and wild fears; and she cast a shuddering glance towards the two sentinels behind her.

At the next moment she felt Faust grasp her by the hand; and when she turned towards him the wicket of the gate stood open.

He hurried her through, and immediately closed the little door behind him.

They now stood upon the narrow space between the outside of the gates and the drawbridge, which was raised, and therefore formed a huge barrier in front of them.

But Faust, glancing hastily down into the deep moat on one side of the drawbridge, seemed to know full well how to act.

"We must cross in a boat," he said, in a whisper to Theresa; "and it is waiting for us."

He then took the maiden in his arms, and leapt from the narrow space on which they had been standing into a boat that lay against the castle wall.

Theresa sank almost insensible upon a seat in the boat; for her deliverance was effected with such rapidity, and under circumstances which appeared so strange to her, that she was now almost completely overcome by the terrors that oppressed her.

Faust whispered a word of encouragement in her ear; then pushing the boat from the wall, it shot rapidly across the moat.

On the opposite side it touched against the poles that supported the framework which formed the rest whereon the drawbridge fell when lowered on that bank.

The transverse beams that connected those poles constituted a ladder up which Faust clambered, with Theresa in his arms.

And now they were safe upon the bank which bounded the moat of Linsdorf Castle.

"Theresa—beloved Theresa," said Faust, "you are free!"

These words conveyed an assurance so welcome that it instantly predominated over all other sentiments, and chased away all her terrors from the maiden's mind.

"Support yourself on my arm," added Faust; "at the entrance of the forest horses are waiting for us."

Such was indeed the case. They speedily reached a spot where two horses were fastened to a tree; but no one was near in charge of them.

Faust assisted the lady to mount one of the steeds; he then leapt upon the back of the other; and, taking the rein of Theresa's horse, urged the two animals to a gallop along the road, which wound its circuitous way round the confines of the forest.

The joy which she experienced at her deliverance, the excitement of the rapid ride, the presence of her lover, and the thought of speedily being restored to her father, gave new life and confidence to the lady; and as the tramp of the horses struck upon her ears, and the sharp,

brisk breeze agitated the dense foliage of the forest, she smiled at the terrors which she had experienced in the castle.

"You will say that I am a silly maiden, Wilhelm," observed Theresa, when they relaxed their speed for a short space in order to breathe the horses; "but I was suddenly inspired with so strange a supposition, when we were in the castle ere now, that I nearly fainted with excess of terror."

"And what was that supposition, dearest girl?" asked Faust, anxiously contemplating that countenance whose every lovely lineament was clearly traced in the pure moonlight.

"Nay—the idea was so absurd——"

"Mention it, nevertheless," said Faust.

"And you will laugh at me—you will deem me childish!"

"No, Theresa. There are moments when our imaginations play us strange pranks, and people our minds with wondrous fancies."

"True," said Theresa; "and therefore we cannot be blamed if, at a period of profound anxiety and suspense, we allow ourselves to be most strangely swayed by them. I thought that we glided along like spectres—that our steps awoke no echo—that our clothes rustled not—and that our very breath was suspended."

"That fancy proves how you were alarmed, dear Theresa," observed Faust; and had she gazed upon his countenance at that moment, she would have been struck with the strangeness of the smile which for an instant curled his lips. "But we must lose no time: our horses are refreshed; and in another half-hour I will aid you to alight at the gate of your father's castle."

Away galloped the steeds once more: the forest seemed to fly past; and in the time specified they halted at the entrance of Rosenthal Castle.

"May God bless you, Wilhelm!" exclaimed Theresa, as he assisted her to dismount.

His hand grasped hers with a convulsive movement—as if of horror or of sudden pain—as she uttered these words.

"Holy Virgin! are you ill, Wilhelm?" she demanded, anxiously, as she leapt upon the ground.

"No—no—a sudden pang shot through my head; but it is nothing—it is gone!" he replied, hastily. "And now, Theresa, farewell—for the present. You will not hesitate to say to your father that Wilhelm Faust—the once poor and humble student—was thy deliverer; and we shall shortly meet again! In a few days your father will doubtless give the grand festival which he has for some time projected. I shall be amongst the guests!"

Faust then placed the horn, which hung to a post on that side of the moat, to his lips, and blew a loud blast.

In a few moments a warder appeared upon the wall.

Theresa herself replied to his challenge; he knew the voice of his young lady, and almost immediately afterwards the drawbridge was lowered, and the gates flew open.

"Farewell, beloved Theresa," cried Faust, pressing her hand fondly. "We shall meet again, as I have said."

"Adieu till then, Wilhelm," returned Theresa.

They then separated.

The maiden entered the castle; and the heavy clang of the bolts of the gates and the chains of the drawbridge immediately afterwards resounded on her ears.

Faust then mounted his horse once more, and leading the other by the bridle, rode slowly away towards Wittenberg.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FESTIVAL.

Two days after the events just recorded, a grand festival took place at Rosenthal Castle.

The aristocracy, the municipal chiefs, and the judicial worthies of Wittenberg, with their wives and daughters, were invited to this magnificent banquet.

Indeed, the old feudal fortalice had not been so busy nor so blythe for many years. The barracks were crowded with troops—for the Baron had adopted every precaution against a renewal of hostilities on the part of the Count of Linsdorf. The banqueting room was adorned with banners, evergreens, antlers, and other weapons of the chase, together with martial weapons of all descriptions. The kitchens steamed with the odours of savoury viands and delicious ragouts. And the cellarist was busy in tapping huge butts of malvoisie, canary, and Rhenish, in preparation for the festival.

At about five o'clock in the evening, Dewitz, the captain of the castle, marshalled a guard of honour which formed two ranks on either side of the principal entrance to the fortress; the drawbridge was lowered, and the chief steward posted himself in a convenient spot, holding in his hand a long list of those to whom invitations had been sent.

Meantime, the Lady Theresa, dressed in an elegant attire befitting her rank and greatly enhancing her beauty, proceeded to the principal saloon, attended by her maidens, Ida and Maria.

Charles Hamel, wearing the costume of a gentleman of that period, and carrying his plumed hat in his hand, was already seated in that apartment. When Theresa entered he rose, lightly touched with his lips the hand which she presented to him; and, having thus fulfilled the courteous usage of the times, he placed himself by the side of Maria, in whose eyes a gleam of pleasure shone when the handsome youth thus distinguished her with his preference.

Theresa seated herself on a large ottoman near a window that commanded a view of the gate by which the guests were to arrive. The reader may guess what was passing in her mind; and her somewhat pale cheek, her palpitating bosom, and her anxious glance showed that the lovely heiress of Rosenthal was not altogether a stranger to suspense.

In a few minutes the Baron, dressed as a nobleman of the German empire, and wearing the gold collar which denoted his high rank, entered the saloon, attended by two pages in waiting.

After exchanging a few words with his daughter, he observed her restlessness of manner, and bending over her said, in a whisper—

"Theresa, you are unhappy. Can you not call a smile to your lips to welcome your father's guests, who are even now arriving?"

"My lord, we cannot always command our feelings," returned Theresa, in a respectful tone. "But I trust that I shall not be found wanting in courtesy towards those who are about to assemble in your halls."

"You are grieved, Theresa, that I did not invite the young student who has so long persecuted you with his addresses."

"And who delivered me from the power of the haughty Count of Linsdorf," added Theresa, emphatically.

"I admit the eminence of that service, daughter," answered the Baron; "and I despatched our faithful Dewitz to his lodging to desire him to name his reward, as well as the amount of the heavy sum which he must have expended to bribe the Count's guards. How he could have obtained such resources is to me the most incomprehensible. A pauper student!"

"He is not altogether what he seems," said Theresa; "and without having any positive proof, I feel certain that his means and his power—perhaps also his rank and name—are higher than your lordship is inclined to believe."

"On that head let us not dispute. Peradventure, I behold him with less partial, and therefore more correct eyes than you," continued the Baron. "But as I was ere now observing, I did all that became a peer and a belted knight to acknowledge a service rendered by one of far inferior degree. My faithful Dewitz sought him in his humble lodging, and conveyed my message in the most courteous terms. But the young man rashly refused my offers of forgiveness for the past, reward for the present, and protection for the future; and there was that in his manner and his discourse which convinced the captain that he is an empty, even if not an insane, boaster."

Scarcely had the Baron uttered these words, when the folding doors of the saloon were thrown open, and the seneschal of the castle—an old and venerable man, decked with the massive gold chain which was the emblem of his office—announced "the most worshipful and excellent Messer Kircher, the chief judge of Wittenberg."

This important personage was about fifty years of age, with a handsome countenance, but weak and slender form. His hair was only so far tinged with white that it seemed an iron gray, his eyes were expressive of cunning, and his lips wore a sardonic smile that denoted a cruel and unrelenting disposition.

When he had saluted the Lady Theresa, the Baron drew him aside, and said—

"My daughter is still infatuated with that beggarly student who lately escaped in so incomprehensible a manner from the prison into which your excellency had thrown him."

At these words, which were spoken in a low and solemn

whisper, the countenance of the chief judge suddenly lost all its ferocity, and assumed an expression of profound terror.

"My lord," he answered, "I dare not meddle further with that young man."

"Nay, I seek not now to do him harm," returned the Baron. "He has conferred an eminent service upon me, by rescuing my daughter from the false caittiff of Linsdorf, and I dare not inflict the full measure of my wrath upon him. But he must be removed from this district. Your excellency will see that this be done with fitting despatch and secrecy."

"Not for worlds, my lord," replied the chief judge, "would I interfere with him again. Do you suppose that when he was at large in Wittenberg, after having escaped from his dungeon, and thus dared the power of the law—does your lordship suppose that I would have suffered him to laugh at our authority, had I not sufficient reason to wash my hands of him and his affairs?"

"And that reason?" asked the Baron.

For some moments the chief judge made no reply, but his countenance grew ominously lowering and sombre.

"Were I on my death bed, my lord," he at length answered, "I would scarcely reveal that secret to the priest who confessed me."

The judge turned away, to avoid further conversation upon this head, and the Baron's attention was immediately afterwards diverted from the subject by the announcement of other guests.

And now a number of elegantly-dressed ladies and gay knights and gentlemen entered the saloon. There were also the chiefs of the university and the municipal authorities, in their official costumes. Many of the young ladies were distinguished for their beauty, but none eclipsed Theresa, who was the queen of loveliness as well as of the festival.

Presently the great bell on the castle donjon tolled; and this was a signal to announce that the banquet was served up.

Then the seneschal appeared at the door, holding a white wand in his hand, and bowed three times to the assembled company. Such was the usage in the great feudal habitations of the German peers in those times.

The chief judge presented his hand to Theresa, and the other gentlemen and ladies formed a procession to the banquetting hall.

Charles Hamel conducted the fair Maria; for on these occasions the favourite dependents of the lady of the mansion were numbered amongst the guests.

The banquetting hall was lighted in a brilliant manner; the tables groaned beneath the weight of the luxurious viands and delicious wines spread upon them. The scene was altogether gorgeous and attractive in the extreme.

The Baron took his seat at the head of the table; his daughter sat on his right hand. When all the guests, to the number of a hundred, had taken their places, Theresa cast a rapid glance around; but her eye encountered not him whose presence she expected, but which she more or less dreaded, in consequence of the opposition of her father to the young student's suit.

Charles Hamel might have occupied a seat at the upper part of the hall, by virtue of his rank as a gentleman, the strong recommendations he had received from high quarters, and his quality as the Baron's guest; but he preferred a place in a less honoured part of the room, because he would not separate from his fair companion.

Thus, while the conversation was general elsewhere, Charles was whispering tender things in the ears of Maria; and the young maiden listened with joy in her eye and a blush upon her cheek.

By degrees, as the wine flowed more freely, and when the viands had given place to vases of delicious fruits set off with flowers, Charles and Maria were enabled to discourse without reserve, especially as the guest who had hitherto occupied a seat next to Hamel had been compelled to retire through sudden indisposition.

"Sweet maiden," whispered Charles, "not many days have I known thee; but enough have I seen of thy gentle disposition to learn to love thee. I am not rich, neither am I noble, but I possess enough of the world's most coveted metal to insure a happy competency, and my name has never been disgraced."

"You honour me, Messer Hamel, with your offer," faltered Maria; "but, remember, I am naught save a poor peasant's orphan—one whom the Lady Theresa's mother took compassion upon—"

"Were you still the inhabitant of a cottage, and were I

the proudest prince in Germany," interrupted Hamel, enthusiastically, "I should esteem myself blessed in your love. Tell me, Maria—tell me, dearest maiden—can you love the poor gentleman who now offers you his heart and hand?"

The beautiful girl made no reply, but cast upon the young man a look so full of tenderness and devotion that he read the happy answer in her melting blue eyes—an answer couched in all the sweetest meanings of the mute language of love.

Maria then hastily glided out of the hall. Her heart was too full of emotions of joy, and hope, and love to contain its feelings; for when bliss comes unexpectedly it often demands a vent in tears, as well as sudden anguish.

Scarcely had the receding form of the charming girl disappeared when Charles Hamel felt someone touch him upon the shoulder.

He looked round, and beheld a handsome young man, splendidly attired, in the seat next to him—that seat which had remained for some time vacant in consequence of the sudden indisposition of the guest who had quitted it. For a moment Hamel thought that it was the same guest, who had returned to his seat; but a second glance at the young man's countenance convinced him that he was a new comer.

"You love that gentle maiden who has just retired?" said the stranger, in a whisper.

"And in what does that concern you?" demanded Hamel, eyeing the young man, indignantly.

"I will presently show you," calmly replied the other. "Would you not consider that you owed a service to anyone who was fortunate enough to save you from a desperate peril—to rescue you, in a word, from the abyss of destruction?"

"Aye, certainly would I, Sir Stranger," returned Hamel, the scornful expression of his countenance now yielding to an appearance of extreme curiosity. "But am I at this moment hovering on the eve of such danger, and hast thou the power to save me?"

"No—that is past," rejoined the young stranger. "Wast thou not rescued from the hands of the officers of the Bloody League in the midst of Linsdorf Forest?"

"I was," answered Hamel; "and if you know my deliverer—"

"Patience for one moment. Wast thou not also saved from death on the ramparts of this castle?" continued the stranger.

"Yes; and again I say—"

"The tall form muffled in a long, dark cloak—"

"Who saved me from the Vehm?" added Charles.

"And the knight in complete armour—"

"Who rescued me on the ramparts?"

"They were one and the same person," said the stranger.

"Then, how deep a debt of gratitude do I owe to that individual," returned Charles Hamel. "This strange and mysterious—I had almost said supernatural—preserver on these two occasions—"

"We have not time to waste words," interrupted the stranger, impatiently. "The moment is now at hand when you can perhaps testify your gratitude to your deliverer."

"My deliverer! Where is he? What does he require? How can I serve him?" said Charles Hamel, in a hurried whisper.

"He is here," replied the stranger. "I am your deliverer."

"You?" said Charles.

"Yes—I," was the calm reply.

"Then, generous man, name your demand—and I swear by the imperial—"

"Nay—the task is an easy one, since you love the Lady Theresa's dependent, the beautiful Maria," interrupted the stranger.

He then drew from the bosom of his doublet a paper, which he unrolled and handed to Charles Hamel.

Charles glanced over its contents with the most profound astonishment; and when he had perused them, he turned a glance of mingled surprise and suspicion upon the stranger.

"I know you—no matter how," observed this singular individual; "I have served you well upon two occasions—no matter why. Do I ask too great a boon in return for those services when I desire you to sign that paper?"

"No; I owe you my life—I cannot hesitate to comply with your request," answered Charles. "But I must withdraw to my own chamber for pen and ink."

"Not so; I have both here," said the stranger; and he took from his doublet a small case containing writing implements.

"The guests will observe us—the Baron will deem our conduct strange—"

"See you not that we are unnoticed?" interrupted the young stranger. "The guests near us are intent upon their own discourse—those at the upper end are listening to some anecdote which the chief judge is relating—in a word, not an eye is upon us."

A single glance convinced Charles Hamel that such was the fact.

Accordingly, without another moment's hesitation; he seized the pen which the stranger presented to him, and wrote something at the bottom of the paper.

The stranger instantly took the document from the table, and handed it to someone who at that moment passed behind him.

Charles Hamel cast a glance of surprise upon the stranger.

"I merely gave it to my valet," remarked the latter, calmly; "he will convey it to a place of safety."

Hamel was about to make some answer, when cries of horror from the upper end of the table, and a tremendous ejaculation of rage from the Baron of Rosenthal, caused him and the other guests near to start from their seats in alarm.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE INTERRUPTION OF THE FESTIVAL.

IN order to explain the cause of this sudden and alarming interruption of the festivities, we must relate what had been taking place at the upper end of the room while that singular scene was enacting between Charles Hamel and the young stranger.

Theresa endeavoured to respond as courteously as possible to the lively sallies and gallant phrases which were circulated at the superior end of the hall; but ever and anon her cheek flushed suddenly, and as suddenly grew pale—for her mind was a prey to deep suspense and all the emotions of anxiety.

The chief judge was by no means averse to the wine-cup; and the quantity of mighty venison pasty which he had appropriated to his use during the banquet appeared to him to require a proportionate amount of good malvoisie to wash it down.

The Baron was by no means averse to keep his excellency company in emptying the silver flagon, and the other knights, gentlemen, and worthies at the upper table could not do otherwise than follow so excellent an example.

The ladies in that quarter of the hall did not hesitate to quaff a cup of Rhenish, as an agreeable accompaniment to the fruits and sweetmeats which formed the dessert; and thus wit circulated, laughter raised its kindred echoes, compliments evoked sweet smiles and tender glances, and sprightly anecdotes added to the conviviality.

Warmed by the generous wine, the chief judge, addressing himself to the Baron, Theresa, and those guests who were in his immediate vicinity, exclaimed—

"You have hitherto done naught save laugh at every tale and joyous saying that has met your ears. I will, with your permission, relate an anecdote, which, methinks, you will not hear without interest."

"Attention to his excellency!" cried the Baron.

All were immediately silent in that particular vicinity, and as the chief judge went on with his narrative, several of the guests who had been previously seated at a distance, rose and approached the place which his excellency occupied, in order to hear a tale characterised by an interest that grew more absorbing as it proceeded—

"It was, as nearly as I can guess, twenty-four years ago when I was appointed prothonotary to the Imperial Chancery at Vienna. My duty, as you are doubtless well aware, was to keep the archives of the empire and the registers of the Court. I had occupied that situation for nearly a year, when I was one evening summoned in haste to the palace of the Archduke Charles, the brother of the present Emperor. I was ushered into a magnificent saloon, where the Chancellor of the Empire and other great dignitaries of the Court were already assembled. I then learned that the Archduchess was momentarily expected to become a mother, and I accordingly prepared my papers for the registry of the important event. There were three doors to that vast saloon. The first communicated with the grand staircase by which I had been conducted thither; the second opened into the apartment of the Archduchess; and the third, which was exactly opposite, belonged to the Chamber of the Cradle. You are not, perhaps, all acquainted with the ceremonial ob-

served on occasions of the birth of German princes, and I will therefore explain the use and object of the Chamber of the Cradle. The moment a prince or a princess is born the nurse receives the infant from its illustrious mother and takes it into the adjoining apartment, where it is shown to the great dignitaries there assembled. The prothonotary then registers the hour of its birth, its sex, the appearance of the infant—whether healthy or sickly—and any other particulars which the medical attendant may suggest as a means of proving the identity of the imperial offspring in case of need.

"This ceremonial being accomplished, the nurse proceeds straight into the Chamber of the Cradle, where she remains with the child until the next morning. During the interval a soldier of the Imperial Guard, the members of which all draw lots to decide on whom the honour is to fall, mounts guard at the door of the Chamber of the Cradle. Thus the child is said to be in the care of the army. It is death to that sentinel to sleep on his post, or to admit anyone save the physician into the Chamber of the Cradle. Early on the morning following the birth, the troops are drawn up in front of the palace where the illustrious offspring was born, and that soldier who has been chosen by lot to be its guard has the supreme honour of appearing with it in his arms upon the balcony, and presenting it to the people. Then that soldier receives promotion and reward, and the ceremony of the Chamber of the Cradle is concluded."

"How singular!" exclaimed several of the guests.

"That ceremony has existed for a long period," said the chief judge; "and now that you are fully acquainted with the particulars, you will the better understand my narrative. I observed ere now that her Imperial Highness the Archduchess was about to fulfil the hopes of her affectionate husband. We had not been long assembled when the Archduke Charles made his appearance amongst us, and greeted us most cordially. Then passed an hour of suspense—almost of uninterrupted silence. At length the Duchess's chamber was opened, and the chief physician came forward to announce that her Imperial Highness had given birth to a prince. That prince, I need scarcely observe, is the present Archduke Leopold."

"To whom my daughter is betrothed," said the Baron, proudly; "and who will no doubt shortly visit Rosenthal to claim his bride."

Theresa with difficulty repressed a profound sigh.

"The moment that this announcement was made," continued the chief judge, "we all congratulated his Imperial Highness the Archduke Charles upon the birth of an heir to his illustrious house, and the Archduke presented the physician with a ring of immense value. The physician then returned into the chamber of the Archduchess; and in another hour the nurse appeared, bearing the infant prince in her arms. My duty was speedily fulfilled; the child was healthy, and the Archduke was enraptured with the honours of paternity. A messenger was immediately despatched to the barracks of the Imperial Guard, to notify to the commanding officer that it was now time to send to the archducal palace the soldier who had been chosen to perform the duty of sentinel at the door of the Chamber of the Cradle. Presently that sentinel arrived. He was a tall, handsome man, about thirty years of age—a native of Hungary, and named Ulric Kinis. But there was something in his countenance which I did not like—although I scarcely knew why I conceived that sudden prejudice against him. However, it was not for me to mention my capricious suspicions, and the ceremonial proceeded. The nurse repaired, with the illustrious child in her arms, into the Chamber of the Cradle; the door closed behind her, and the sentinel took his place near it. The Archduke, the Chancellor, and the various dignitaries retired, and I was, of course, compelled to follow them. A banquet was served up to us in another apartment, but I withdrew early, for I felt uneasy—and yet I knew not why—relative to the fidelity of Ulric Kinis."

"Simply because he had a countenance which did not please your excellency," returned the Baron, laughing.

"Whether I was justified or not in my suspicions, your lordship will presently see," continued the chief judge. "I stole away from the banquet, and hastened to the great saloon in which the sentinel was mounting guard. By virtue of my situation I had right of access to that part of the archducal palace, for, as keeper of the archives and register of the imperial births, marriages, and deaths, I was justified in satisfying myself that the sentinel kept due and careful watch at the door of the Chamber of the Cradle. I entered the saloon very gently; the lamps were burning brightly, and their lustre was enhanced by re-

flection in many mirrors. To my surprise Ulric Kinis was not there. I advanced to the door of the Chamber of the Cradle, and heard persons speaking within. 'At midnight,' said one voice, which I recognised to be that of the physician.—'The palace will then be quiet, and there will be no fear of interruption,' observed the nurse.—'And my reward?' said Kinis, the sentinel.—'It is here,' answered the physician: 'I will give thee this ring of incalculable price, which his Imperial Highness presented to me. The moment that the change is effected and that I see you are really devoted to my interests, and those of my sister, this ring shall be transferred from my finger to yours.'—'In that case, I am willing to adhere to our bargain,' said Kinis.—'And you will ever find myself and my husband disposed to befriend you in any emergency,' observed the nurse.—'Yes,' continued the physician; 'for I have staked fortune, life, and everything upon this design; and my wife, in accepting the appointment of nurse to carry out the scheme, has done the same.'—'It shall be as you desire,' said Kinis; 'did I not assure you this afternoon, when you sought me after the lot had fallen upon me, that I was anxious to enrich myself at any sacrifice?'—'True,' replied the physician; 'and you shall be enriched, for this ring will realize for you a princely fortune.'—As I then heard a movement within the Chamber of the Cradle, as if the sentinel were about to come forth, and as I had heard quite sufficient to convince myself that some infernal treachery was in train, I hastily withdrew from the saloon."

"Now the plot thickens," said the Baron. "Attention to his excellency."

But scarcely had the Baron uttered these words when some one rushed from behind the high back of his chair, and struck a naked dagger forcibly into the table.

So suddenly was this deed performed, and such a sensation did it produce, that the individual who perpetrated it disappeared before any one thought of even looking for him.

The Baron uttered an ejaculation of furious rage, and the guests gave vent to a simultaneous cry of horror.

For round the handle of the weapon was twisted the cord—dread emblem of the Vehm; and to that cord was fastened a slip of parchment, whose significant signature consisted of three daggers.

Theresa screamed, and cast a glance of ineffable agony around, when she beheld that fearful symbol, so abruptly thrown, as it were, amongst the assembled guests.

"By the Virgin!" ejaculated the Baron, "he must be a bold man who hath done this! Ho! minions, let the drawbridge be raised; let the sentinels be doubled round the walls; and see that no one leaves the castle, on peril of your lives!"

The men-at-arms who were stationed near the door of the hall hastened to execute these orders.

"And now," said the Baron, "let us see what this insolent missive contains."

But though he spoke thus boldly, the Lord of Rosenthal could scarcely subdue a shuddering sensation, nor suppress a partial quivering of the lip as he read aloud the contents of the parchment slip:—

"By the Cord and Dagger you are commanded to appear beneath the lime tree on Wallenstein-hill, at mid-day, on the Sabbath ensuing the receipt of this summons; and thither you are ordered to repair unarmed and unattended. Wherein see that you fail not."

"+++"

"I swear," continued the Baron, his eyes now flashing fire, "that I will accord to him who shall detect the perpetrator of this outrage whatsoever boon he may ask, provided that it be in my power to grant it; and this I vow by my rank as a noble of the German Empire, and by my honour as a belted knight!"

"Amen!" exclaimed the chief justice.

"Be mine that task!" cried the young stranger who was seated next to Charles Hamel, and who started from his seat, elevating his fine but slender form to its full height as he uttered those words.

"What? Faust!" ejaculated the Baron, in astonishment at beholding the young student amongst his guests. "Well—be it as you say!"

"Wilhelm!" murmured Theresa; and vague hopes which she could scarcely define, were suddenly excited in the maiden's gentle breast.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE THREE OBJECTIONS.

It may be readily supposed that the interruption which the festivities had sustained in so sudden a manner produced the greatest excitement amongst the guests assembled in the hall of Rosenthal Castle.

All eyes were turned towards Faust, and Charles Hamel now learned for the first time the name of him who was his deliverer, and at whose request he had signed a certain document a few moments previously.

But the excitement thus produced amongst those present was not immediately allowed to subside; for Faust, waving his hand in an authoritative manner, as if to command the company to retain their places until his return, passed abruptly from the hall.

Several minutes elapsed in profound silence, then a few stifled whispers arose here and there; but these were suddenly cut short by the opening of the folding doors of the hall once more, and Faust reappeared.

In the midst of the most solemn silence, he advanced towards the upper end of the hall, and said—

"My lord, the culprit is in custody. Your men-at-arms have him in their power."

"Thanks, worthy sir," answered the Baron. "I will keep my promise to thee as soon as the daring wight shall have been disposed of. Fortunately, to assist our proceedings, his excellency the chief judge is present, and it remains for him to say how far a self-constituted tribunal is justified in sending its murderous agents to menace the lives of the peers and chief of the German Empire in their very halls."

"As a superior of one of the legally appointed courts," answered the chief judge, "I cannot do otherwise than detest proceedings that take the functions of justice from the hands of those tribunals which rightfully exist; and I consider the members of the Holy Vehm as opponents to the sovereign privileges of our most glorious Emperor."

Although the chief judge spoke these words with great firmness, they were nevertheless heard with a shudder by many present, and the blushing cheek of beauty and the contracting brow of knighthood bore testimony to the alarm excited by so audaciously expressed an opinion of the tremendous tribunal of the Blood League.

"Of a surety," said the Baron, "the violence of these secret assassins passes all bounds. There can be no doubt that this summons emanated from the Count of Linsdorf, who is well known to be a chief amongst the members of the Vehm. The proud noble, unable to conquer me in fair fight, seeks my life by the means of the cord and dagger. Say, Messer Kircher," he continued, addressing himself to the chief judge, "what punishment should I inflict upon the wretch who has dared to mar our festivities this evening?"

"Is the accuser well prepared to prove that the prisoner is the person who did really and truly perpetrate that outrage?" exclaimed the judge.

"He does not deny the fact; he rather glories in it," answered Faust. "Moreover, the secret instructions which he received from his superiors have been found upon him."

"In that case," continued the judge, "we may spare this fair company the pain of gazing upon a member of a fraternity of assassins—we will not have him brought hither; but do you, my lord, command that he be forthwith hanged over the principal entrance of Rosenthal Castle, as an example to all those who venture to obey the behests of the Bloody League."

"Dewitz," cried the Baron, "let the prisoner be forthwith punished as his excellency has ordained; and hesitate not—pause not—show no mercy, be he who or what he may."

"Such is also my command, good captain," exclaimed the chief judge, who was ever anxious to adopt proceedings which might impair the influence and weaken the authority of the Vehm—a feeling which he shared in common with all the legally appointed judicial authorities of Germany. "Hesitate not—pause not—show no mercy," he continued, his dark eyes flashing and his lips wearing a more cruel expression than ever. "And should there be any member of that unholy and illegal confederation now present," he added, "let him take warning from the course which the only true justice recognised in the realm is now about to take."

Dewitz bowed, and hurried from the hall.

So profound an impression of terror had this bold proceeding on the part of the Baron and the chief judge

produced amongst the guests, that not a voice—not even a female voice—was raised to implore mercy for the prisoner.

Theresa alone cast a glance of compassionate appeal towards her father; but he answered it with a frown, and the maiden's eyes fell, abashed and overawed, beneath that ominous look.

"And now, Sir Student," cried the Baron, after a pause, "I pledged my word as a peer and my honour as a knight to grant whatever request should be demanded of me by him who would deliver the agent of the Bloody League into my power. From that pledge I am in nowise inclined to fly; for it behoves me to show that I can reward as well as punish. At the same time remember, Sir Student," continued the Baron, significantly, "that there is a qualification to my vow, which only permits me to grant what I may not consistently refuse."

"Your lordship's words were these," said Faust, boldly:—"I will accord to him who shall detect the perpetrator of this outrage whatsoever boon he may ask, provided it be in my power to grant it."

"Your memory is a good one, Sir Student," answered the Baron; "and as I owe you large recompense for another service which you performed, in delivering the Lady Theresa from the power of the Count of Linsdorf, hesitate not to name a reward that will satisfy all the obligations due from me to thee at once."

"Ere I name my demand," said Faust, "it were as well to inform your lordship that there was another small service which I was enabled to render you, and which need not remain concealed. On the day when the warriors of Linsdorf stormed your castle, it was I who, attired in complete armour and wearing snow-white plumes, restored courage to your troops, and enabled them to repulse your foemen."

"The tale has reached thine ears, Sir Student," said the Baron, sarcastically; "and thou dost untruly proclaim thyself the hero of that day."

"Do you doubt me?" cried Faust, his countenance flushing with the deepest crimson. "I could give your lordship such convincing proof—But, no; I appeal to Messer Hamel, whether he will put faith in my assertion."

"I cannot doubt it," replied Charles; "I believe I owe my life to that brave youth on two distinct occasions."

"Then am I bound to thank thee, Sir Student, for that service also," returned the Baron, with but indifferent grace. "Therefore would you do well to combine the three rewards I owe you in one, and name it without further delay."

"It shall be so," said Faust; then, elevating his voice, he exclaimed, "I appeal to your lordship and to all this honoured company, whether the man who delivered the home of the noble race of Rosenthal from the pillage and plunder of revengeful assailants—who restored your lordship's daughter to her father's arms when her fate seemed to depend upon the success of the hostilities which you meditated, and which might have ended in defeat—who has now fulfilled your earnest wish in placing at your lordship's disposal the individual by whom a vile outrage was perpetrated against you in the presence of your guests—I appeal to you whether the man who has done this, asks too much when he demands the hand of your beauteous daughter?"

All eyes were turned towards the Baron; and from him they were cast, as if by a common impulse, upon Theresa.

For a few moments the brow of the former became overshadowed; but he evidently exerted himself to subdue his angry feelings.

Theresa blushed deeply and hung down her head.

"The services that you have rendered me, Sir Student," at length spoke the Baron, "are so great that it would be inconsistent with true chivalry and knightly courtesy to answer you rudely. At the same time you have made a demand which it is beyond my power to grant, and my refusal is shielded by the qualification to my vow, of which I lately made mention."

"My lord," replied Faust, while all present listened to this strange colloquy with profound interest, "there are but three reasons which could induce you to refuse me your daughter's hand. The first is a supposition that I am poor in purse and ignoble in position—the second is that the Lady Theresa herself may not be willing to bestow her affections upon me—the third is that she is betrothed to another."

"Thou art a most subtle casuist against thyself, Faust," observed the Baron, growing somewhat impatient at the discourse. "Even his excellency the chief judge, who is famed as a subtle lawyer, could not make out a better case against thee."



"Let us see," answered Faust, proudly. "Not far from Vienna stands the lordly castle of Aurana; and thereto belong broad lands whose horizon is far more extensive than that of the fief of Rosenthal. To these possessions is attached the style and title of Count and peer of the German Empire—a distinction and rank, my lord, as great as thine."

"And how does all this avail thee, Sir Student?" demanded the Baron. "I am well aware that the fief of which thou speakest lately devolved, through default of the heirship, to the imperial crown; but who in Germany is wealthy enough to purchase it?"

"That fief is mine," answered Faust; "mine also is the title."

Then, taking a parchment from the bosom of his doublet, he opened it before the chief judge, saying—

"His excellency, who was once prothonotary in the Imperial Chancery, can testify whether this be a true deed or a base fabrication."

Messer Kircher cast a rapid and astonished glance over the document, and then said—

"This is a good and legal title. I know the imperial signature right well."

"My lord Count of Aurana," exclaimed the Baron, astounded at this news, "your place is at this board—with us. Thou hast proved thy rank and fortune; and I give thee great joy of their possession. It may also be that my daughter would not repulse thy suit—but the third objection which your lordship's self started is invincible. The Lady Theresa is betrothed to another."

"And that troth is broken," exclaimed Faust.

"Broken, how say you?" cried the Baron.

"I will explain this new enigma," continued Faust. "Few here are unaware that I lately languished in the prison of the neighbouring city. My release was effected by one—"

Here the chief judge trembled from head to foot.

"By one," continued Faust, "who possesses wealth and power beyond your limited conception. He took compassion on me; and not content with restoring me to freedom, employed a portion of his wealth to purchase the fief which enriches and ennobles me. By day and night he travelled till he reached Vienna, where business was concluded in a few hours. There he encountered the Archduke Leopold, who intrusted him with a document for the Baron of Rosenthal. By day and night he travelled till he arrived at Wittenberg again. He returned but a few hours since; and now let him deliver his sealed packet to your lordship."

An individual of tall form, plain attire, and with a melancholy cast of countenance, advanced from the lower part of the hall, and presented a sealed document to the Baron.

While the Lord of Rosenthal was opening it, Faust, who had advanced to the upper table, inclined his head over Theresa's chair, and said in a hasty whisper, "Beloved one, thou shalt be mine!"

The Baron glanced his eyes hastily over the document, and then threw it upon the table with an air of bitter disappointment, exclaiming at the same time, "The Archduke cancels the betrothal of his own accord?"

The chief judge drew the parchment towards him, and read it attentively.

"His Imperial Highness," he observed, when he had perused it, "acts most nobly. He says that he is aware that the Lady Theresa has conferred her affections upon another; and he as candidly admits that he himself is enamoured of one whose virtues and good qualities have made his heart unalterably hers."

"What answer does your lordship now give to my suit?" demanded Faust, after a few minutes of profound silence.

"Count of Aurana," replied the Baron, "you have conquered every objection."

Faust took the hand which Lady Theresa extended to him and kissed it respectfully, while many voices offered him their congratulations.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE CONDITION—THE REVENGE.

THE incidents which we have narrated in the last chapter took place with a rapidity which hurried the attention and the interest of the guests along with a species of galvanic power.

Each consecutive event was of a nature to banish the preceding one from the minds of the inmates of the hall, and engross all curiosity to itself.

Thus, when the cord and dagger so suddenly appeared upon the table, the chief judge's anecdote concerning the Chamber of the Cradle was forgotten: then, when the Baron and the judge doomed a member of the Vehm to death unheard, and in so summary a manner, the outrage which the culprit had perpetrated was absorbed in the terror which his punishment inspired around:—and, in its turn, this feeling was displayed by the interest, suspense, curiosity, and surprise excited by the demand that Faust had made for Theresa's hand, and the incidents which had led him to triumphant success in his difficult suit.

Having drunk a cup of wine in honour of the Count of Aurana and his intended bride, the ladies all withdrew from the banquet hall to the magnificent saloons above, where tables were spread with cakes, sweetmeats, and pastry, and all the refinements of German cookery known at that period.

Faust also left the hall upon some pretext; but it was not to follow the fair portion of the guests. His steps were bent to the ramparts, and there, in an obscure nook, formed by the angle of one of the works, he accosted an individual who was lounging over the parapet, and apparently waiting for him.

"Thou hast succeeded, Faust," said the Demon—for it was he—in his deep, sonorous voice.

"I have succeeded, truly," answered the Count of Aurana: "the ceremony shall take place three days hence. But can no entreaties move thee to relax the awful conditions which thou hast imposed upon me?"

No human power can make me change," was the reply. "Weak mortal, art thou ever repenting of the past—ever looking with anxiety to the future?"

"The future!" added Faust, with a shudder. "Oh! to me that idea is horrible!"

"Think, then, of the joys of the present," returned the demon. "Theresa will be thine—naught now can separate her from thee. Thou hast humbled her proud and haughty father: there thy vengeance is satisfied. And on the chief judge the thunderbolt of thy wrath has fallen with terrific fury."

"He has yet to feel the blow—and that will be ere long," answered Faust; and, as the Demon reminded him of all he had done, the young man rejoiced and felt pride in that power for which he was to pay so terrific a price hereafter.

"Did I not counsel thee wisely," continued the Demon, "when I advised thee to save the life of him whom the members of the Vehm were about to hang to the tall pine in the forest? Did I not instruct thee for thy good when I told thee to rescue him again on the ramparts of Rosenthal? Was I not right when I enjoined thee to allow the Lord of Linsdorf to succeed in carrying away Theresa, ere thou didst hasten to the assistance of the Baron? Short-sighted mortal! hadst thou listened to my advice throughout, there would have been no need to raise that appalling storm which desolated the land! Thou shouldst have rescued Theresa at once, as thou didst at last when her virtue proved stronger than thine eloquence and thine allurements."

"Had you not deceived me, fiend, in respect to her love for another? Did you not beguile me with thy delusion of the portrait?" demanded Faust, enraged at the Demon's reproaches.

"Well—well—enough of that!" cried the Demon, with a sardonic laugh. "I did all I could to make thee mine; and now do I not serve thee faithfully? In three days, thou sayest, the bridal ceremony is to take place."

"In three days I shall make Theresa mine," returned Faust. "And yet I hesitate—yes, I hesitate to comply with that cruel condition which will entail an early death upon my first-born son."

"Nay, do not hesitate to secure thine own happiness, Faust," said the Demon: "and, at all events, do not reproach me!"

"Reproach you! Whom, then, should I reproach?"

"Yourself! You should have argued every clause of that agreement which makes me thine for four and twenty years, and then makes thee mine for all eternity."

"Oh! much should I have gained," exclaimed Faust, bitterly, "had I reasoned, debated, argued, and considered every condition with you! Your infernal sophistry would have overcome me."

"Perhaps," said the Demon, with a low chuckle. "But how stands the present case? Let us contemplate it fairly. Our agreement stipulates that thou shalt not enter a sacred fane or place of holy worship, to perform therein any rite or ceremony, without my consent—under penalty of giving me immediate and full power over thee."



Thou hast seen that Theresa would not desert her father and forget her maidenly position to fly with thee. Thou hast been compelled to gain her by means apparently fair and honourable; and now thou hesitatest upon the portal of the church wherein is the altar to which you must conduct her."

"Hesitate!" ejaculated Faust; "and wherefore do I hesitate?" he continued, wildly. "Because, as the sole condition on which you consent to waive that clause which would make me thine at once—because as the only inducement by which thou wilt permit me to appear at the altar where Theresa is to be made mine, you demand that I assign to thee the same power over my first-born son as thou dost already possess over me! Oh! have I not already given up enough?" cried Faust, convulsed with rage: "why wouldst thou demand more—and that more so much?"

"My thirst for conquest over man is perhaps insatiable," returned the Demon, with cold and provoking calmness.

"Fiend—vile, remorseless fiend!" ejaculated Faust; "wouldst thou even make a man who is not yet wedded—far less nearer paternity—pledge the body and soul of his prospective offspring to thee?"

"I would," answered the Demon. "Such is the condition I insist on now."

"Then, if those who people hell are all like thee," continued Faust, in a tone of mingled rage and despair,—"if the denizens of that far-off world whence you come are as cruel and remorseless as thou,—oh! to what a fate have I consigned myself! Did poor unconscious mortals know what I feel now—what I apprehend in future—and what I have learnt from studying thee, they would sooner rot in the deepest dungeons all their lives,—sooner crawl like the veriest worms in nakedness and misery,—sooner embrace starvation, rags, and every nameless wretchedness, as a boon and as a glory—than turn one single step aside to amend their position by a crime, and thereby risk the company of such as thou in eternal fires of hell!"

"Thy rage is useless," said the Demon, unmoved by this address. "But let me draw a picture for thy contemplation. Surrounded by delicious gardens, where all the fairest flowers and choicest fruits of the earth are found,—commanding a view of beauteous landscapes through which the streams wind their silver way between banks whereon countless herds and flocks are grazing,—while in the horizon green woods and verdant groves woo the steps of youthful lovers into the shade of their calm retreats, and where the air is filled with the delicious melody of myriads of birds,—in the midst of all those joyous and inviting scenes stands a sumptuous mansion. Within its walls all the luxuries and enjoyments that art, device, or wealth can procure, are found. The marble halls are in summer refreshed and rendered pleasant by the play of limpid fountains, margined with flowers; and the saloons, in winter, are filled with a warm and perfumed atmosphere which inspires the most voluptuous and luxurious thoughts. For one in all the vigour of youth and health, to wander amidst those fair scenes without the walls, supporting on his arm the loveliest of earth's women—the fair one of his choice,—to loiter with her in those cool halls when the vertical sun of summer makes the air heavy and oppressive elsewhere;—or, again to recline with her upon a downy ottoman, in a saloon whose warmth, well and equally sustained by artificial means, defies the nipping frost of winter,—tell me, what earthly happiness can compete with all this?"

"Oh! the picture is indeed delightful!" exclaimed Faust, in a tone of rapture—his late rage, remorse, and despair having melted like snow before the glowing and impassioned language of the cunning Demon.

"That scenery and that mansion represent the fief of Auranau!" replied the fiend: "that tender couple, leading so blissful a life, are yourself and Theresa."

"Enough—enough! I agree to your condition," exclaimed Faust. "Let me sign it now."

"Tis well," said the Demon.

He produced a parchment scroll and writing materials on the spot: the moon sent forth a light so beautiful and clear, that those two beings required no artificial lamp to aid them in concluding their unnatural compact.

The Demon then departed in one direction, and Faust proceeded along the ramparts in another.

In a few minutes he drew near the tower overlooking the principal entrance.

To a gibbet upon that eminence hung a human form, the chain by which it was suspended creaking ominously.

The body was oscillating gently; and every now and

then the pure light of the moon fell, as the corpse turned round, upon its ghastly countenance.

"Thus does justice overtake the cowardly menials of the Vehm!" said a voice close by Faust,

"True," returned the Count of Auranau, who immediately recognised the chief judge. "But, meseems, you should know the wretch that is swinging there."

"I!" ejaculated Messer Kircher; "that is scarcely probable, my lord."

"Approach, and let us see," said Faust; and he hastened up the steps leading from the rampart to the top of the tower.

The chief judge followed him.

"Now canst thou obtain a full view of that pale and ghastly countenance," said Faust, in a tone of malignant—infernal triumph.

The chief judge drew nearer, cast one look upon the face of the corpse, and uttered a piercing cry, exclaiming, "My son—my son! my only son!"

And he staggered against the parapet.

"Corrupt and cruel judge," said Faust; "now have I repaid the debt I owe thee for the long and undeserved captivity to which you doomed me, and the untimely death which you had reserved for me on the scaffold!"

While the wretched father rent the air with his agonizing but unavailing cries, Faust walked slowly away, triumphing in the ferocity of his revenge.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE VISIT TO THE PALACE.

OUR narrative now takes a leap of a few weeks, and the reader must transport himself to Vienna.

There, at a house in one of the narrowest, poorest, and most obscure streets of the imperial city, and in a room but indifferently furnished, sat Charles Hamel and his lovely bride, Maria.

It was evening: a lamp burned upon the table, whereon the fragrant meal was also spread.

Charles anxiously watched the charming countenance of his wife as they partook of that repast; but whenever her eyes were turned—and that was often—with looks of ineffable tenderness and love towards him, he hastened to meet her glance, as it were, so as not to allow her to perceive with what attention he had been endeavouring to read her thoughts by the expression of her face.

And she was happy—oh! supremely happy: bright smiles played upon her lips, and joy lighted up her eyes—for she was with her husband, whom she fondly loved.

"We have been more than ten days in Vienna, dearest," said Charles, "and you have not once thought of visiting the great public buildings. Our rambles have been few—and those always in the unfrequented paths beyond the suburbs."

"When we walk abroad, Charles," answered Maria, "I feel as I do when we are at home. I have no ears for any sound save your voice—no eyes for aught save your countenance. When you smile upon me, I am happy—and desire nothing more."

"But you will not always be content to lead this lonely life—even with me?" said Charles.

"Yes—always," replied Maria.

"Sweet girl, how amiable is your disposition—how sincere your heart!" cried the enraptured Charles. "You have never once allowed me to know that you remember how I have deceived you."

"Deceived me!" exclaimed Maria, taking his hand and pressing it fondly. "Impossible, Charles! You have not deceived me—you would not deceive me! Oh! what do you mean by those mysterious words?"

"Nay—they cease to be mysterious when you look around you, Maria," returned Charles. "Did I not assure thee, on that evening when I revealed my love, and received the sweet avowal of thine, at Rosenthal Castle, that I possessed a competent fortune?"

"And have we not enough?" asked Maria, with a sweet smile; "a house to shelter us, and food to sustain us? What more can we require—so long as we are together?"

"Oh! Maria," exclaimed the young man, "you will not admit that I have deceived you! And yet, when you look around and see these naked walls—this scanty furniture—and this frugal meal, you must feel that such is not the happy competency which you believed me to possess, and which you expected to find!"

"Charles—dearest Charles," answered Maria, "I call heaven to witness the truth—the sincerity with which I assure you that I need no splendour, no opulence, to make me happy! There breathes not a woman on the face of

the earth more blessed than I—in my own estimation! What was I when you first saw me?—a menial—”

“Yes; but you inhabited a splendid mansion, where you shared in all the luxuries which surrounded its mistress,” interrupted Hamel.

“Oh! Charles, you do not know my heart!” cried Maria, tears trickling down her cheeks. “Had you been a peasant, compelled to toil from morn to night to earn a scanty and precarious livelihood—and had I, in wedding you, been forced to perform the lowest and most menial offices; were we reduced to share a crust, and drink from the stream—or compelled to wander houseless about the wide world, not knowing when we rose at morn where we should lay our heads again at night—dependent even upon charity for the means to sustain existence, and without a hearth that we could call our own, or any other curtain to shield us than heaven’s own natural canopy—oh! then—even then, dear Charles, would you see smiles upon my lips and joy in my eyes—so long as those smiles were met by thine, and that joy was reflected back in thy glances!”

“Fond, amiable, disinterested being!” exclaimed Charles, pressing his charming wife to his bosom. “Oh! I knew not when, three days after I first asked thy love, our hands were joined at the same altar where the Count of Aurana was also blest with his beloved Theresa—I knew not then the full value of the treasure which I possessed in thee!”

“When you speak thus to me, Charles,” murmured Maria, as she imprinted a tender kiss upon her husband’s brow, “I feel that it were better to wed a beggar whom one loves than a prince on whom the heart cannot be conferred. Oh! never talk again of deceiving me! You promised me your love—and you have kept your word; had you promised me a palace, and conducted me to a hovel, I should not think that you had deceived me, so long as I owned that love of thine!”

“Providence will in some way reward you for this noble—this generous conduct on your part, Maria,” returned Charles. “I now perceive that the love of woman exists not only in romance, and song, and legend: it has life and enduring vitality in her gentle heart! Maria, you have made me happy—supremely happy. Yes—this room is large, naked, and dreary; and that solitary lamp diffuses but a sad lustre around. But when you are here, all is bright, brilliant, and beautiful: your smiles are more pleasing than the rich appointments of gilded saloons—your eyes, bright with the rays of love, by far outshine the myriads of resplendent lamps. Yes, Maria—I am happy beyond all description.”

“And never shall you experience woe through me,” answered Maria.

There was such profound sincerity in the words and manner of the young wife, that to doubt her would have been as monstrously wicked, and as palpably absurd as to deny the presence of the beauteous flowers which decorate the earth, or the warmth of the sun which nurtures them.

“It is not my intention, nor my wish,” continued Charles Hamel, after a long pause, “that we should lead the lives of hermits because we are poor. There are spectacles in this city, on which the humblest and most needy are permitted to gaze, as well as the proudest and most opulent. Such sights cheer the spirits, and interrupt, in a wholesome manner, the monotony of a regular life. To-morrow, my sweetest Maria, we will inspect one of the principal palaces of Vienna, which, in consequence of the absence of its princely owner, is, on certain days, open to the public. You are fond of beautiful paintings, and choice specimens of the arts; your good taste will find food for its study there.”

“Supported on your arm, dearest Charles,” replied Maria. “I shall experience the sincerest pleasure in contemplating those specimens of which you speak. Whose palace is it that we shall visit?”

“That of the Archduke Leopold,” replied Charles.

“The prince whom the Lord of Rosenthal had so long looked upon as his intended son-in-law?” asked Maria.

“The same. But it appears that he loved another, and espoused her in preference to the Lady Theresa. Do you blame him?”

“Oh! no!” answered Maria, enthusiastically. “Had he insisted upon my dear lady accompanying him to the altar, and thus fulfil a contract made for them, and not by themselves—while she herself had bestowed her affections on another—I should have despised him. As it is, I honour and respect him.”

“Thou hast spoken well, Maria,” observed Charles. “To-morrow we will visit the archducal palace; and

as we must not appear in a garb denoting our humble position, thou wilt please me by wearing the same costly dress in which you accompanied me to the altar, and the jewels which the Lady Theresa gave thee on that happy day.”

“If it will please you, Charles,” answered the young wife, “I will do as you direct me.”

That happy pair then retired to their humble pallet in an adjacent room.

On the following morning, Maria arrayed herself in her best attire; and never had she appeared more lovely in the eyes of her enraptured husband.

He also was dressed in his gayest apparel; and any one who had then gazed upon that handsome young man and that lovely creature, who clung so fondly to his arm, would have perceived a fitness in their union, and a wise ordination of heaven which had brought them thus together.

And now, having partaken of the morning’s frugal meal, they set out together towards the palace of the imperial prince—the dwelling of the individual who bore a rank next to that of the Emperor and his son.

The principal gate of the palace was soon reached; and the young couple entered without a question being asked of them.

The pile was spacious, lofty, and magnificent. A vast hall, crowded with officials in gorgeous dresses, was traversed; and the two visitors ascended a grand marble staircase, which led them to several handsome ante-rooms, ornamented with beautiful statues.

The contemplation of these works of art occupied some time; and thence they proceeded to a spacious apartment called the “Hall of Ceremony.” From this saloon two doors opened into other rooms.

“That door,” said Charles, pointing to one, “leads into the Chamber of the Cradle.”

He then described to Maria the object of that apartment, with the purpose of which the reader is already acquainted.

“A strange story is connected with that room,” he continued. “It appears that at the precise time when the present Archduke Leopold was born, the physician, who attended upon his mother, conceived the audacious idea of substituting the infant child of his sister for the imperial prince. That sister became a mother almost at the same moment as the Archduchess; and the physician procured the situation of nurse to the young prince for his own wife. He, moreover, bribed the sentinel, who was appointed to keep guard during the night at the door of the Chamber of the Cradle, to suffer the change to be effected. His villainous measures were so well taken, that he would have assuredly succeeded, had not the prothonotary suspected that treachery was intended. The prothonotary was confirmed in his suspicion by a conversation which he overheard between the physician, the nurse, and the sentinel. He accordingly communicated his suspicions to the Archduke Charles, and proper precautions were adopted. At midnight, the physician introduced into the palace a female, who was also in the secret, and who bore in her arms his sister’s infant. The persons implicated in this detestable plot were immediately arrested. I will not tell you their fate; I have already said enough to interest you in the Chamber of the Cradle. But who, think you, was that prothonotary? None other than Messer Kircher, who, as a reward for the important service thus rendered, was appointed chief judge of Wittenberg.”

“The unhappy father who became suddenly mad on that night—” began Maria, with a shudder.

“When his own son was executed at Rosenthal Castle,” added Charles Hamel. “Yes! would that he had been spared that misery! But his own tongue pronounced the death sentence.”

“And the Count of Aurana knew not that the individual who summoned the Baron with the cord and dagger was the judge’s son,” added Maria.

“It is to be hoped not,” said Charles. “At all events, the Count protested his ignorance of that fact at the time he accused the unfortunate young man; and he showed so noble a disposition towards me on two occasions, that I dare not doubt him.”

Charles now conducted his wife into the Chamber of the Cradle, which was furnished with much splendour. Thence they retraced their steps across the saloon, and proceeded to inspect the other apartments of the palace.

Maria was astonished at the evidence of immense wealth and magnificence, as well as the good taste, which were displayed in all she saw. The Castle of Rosenthal had appeared to her a perfect palace; but it was as inferior to

the dwelling of the Archduke as base metal is to the genuine gold.

The beautiful hangings at the windows—the sumptuous carpets from the looms of Linz—the chairs inlaid with mother of pearl, or silver—the ottomans of truly Oriental luxuriousness—the magnificent mirrors—the crystal chandeliers, with four or five tiers of lustres—the silver sconces which projected from the cornices and pilasters—the immense vases filled with the choicest flowers—and all the other elements of grandeur and sources of comfort, formed a combination of splendour calculated to dazzle alike the most powerful and the most callous mind.

Nevertheless, Charles Hamel seemed but little excited by what he saw; and when questioned by his fair companion, he explained his apathy by stating that he had seen the palace before.

“And now there is but one more scene of interest and attraction to visit in this vast edifice,” said Charles, when nearly three hours had been expended in the inspection of the palace; “and that is the picture-gallery. There you will behold the portraits of many princes of the imperial dynasty—princes, most of whom are now no more. But, if I mistake not, the portrait of the present Archduke Leopold, of whom you have heard so much, is in the collection.”

“I must admit that I have some curiosity to behold the likeness of him for whom the Lady Theresa was originally destined,” said Maria.

“And if he be very handsome,” returned Hamel, with a smile, “take care that you do not fall in love with him.”

“Oh, Charles!” exclaimed the beautiful being who hung upon his arm: “you should not even jest with a love so sincere as mine.”

Hamel smiled again, but made no reply.

They now entered the picture-gallery—a long and noble avenue, and on whose walls were the portraits of numerous princes of the imperial family.

“I have learnt some peculiar circumstances connected with the young Archduke Leopold,” observed Charles. “It appears that his Imperial Highness was unaware of the contract which had been made for him, when in his infancy, by the late archduke and the Baron Rosenthal, until the death of his father. That event took place a year and a half ago. As soon as the time for mourning had expired, and his affairs were placed in proper order, he set off to behold, without announcing his rank, the lady who had been destined for him. As a simple gentleman he was introduced to Theresa; and he soon learnt that she loved another. That circumstance alone would have been sufficient to induce him to release her from any engagement to him; but another occurrence confirmed him in that resolution. He beheld in the same district, a maiden, whose beauty, modesty, and amiable qualifications made an immediate, but not less profound, impression upon his heart!”

“Oh, Charles!” ejaculated Maria, whose wonder had increased as her husband thus addressed her, and whose surprise had now arrived at its height of intense interest and wild uncertainty—for, while Hamel was still speaking, they paused before a portrait, whose lineaments it was impossible to mistake. “Oh, Charles!” she exclaimed, clinging to his arm for support, “what do I see? Your likeness *here*! Yes—it is the same—it is you! Oh! I am frightened—I am alarmed—speak to me! what does this mean?”

And she would have fallen upon her knees had he not sustained her.

Then, drawing himself up to his full height, while his handsome countenance assumed an expression of mingled triumph and joy, said—

“You ask what all this means, beloved one? It means that the period of trial is past, and the hour of reward is come! It means, Maria, that you shall henceforth take your rank amongst the highest princesses in the universe; that a ducal coronet shall grace thy brow, already so ennobled by the diadem in which thy countless virtues glitter like precious stones; it means, sweet girl, that you are the adored and worshipped spouse of Leopold, Archduke of the German Empire.”

“My lord—your Imperial Highness—”

Maria could say no more: she glided from her husband's arm, and sank at his feet, covering his hands with her kisses and her tears.

“Rise, beloved one,” exclaimed Leopold; “and be this henceforth your home. And forgive me if I put thy heart to the test of supposed obscurity and poverty;—pardon me if I tried thy virtues severely, that I might recompense them nobly! And, oh!” he continued, as he pressed

the blushing girl to his heart, “if I ever rejoiced in that rank which gives me such power to do good—if I ever felt proud of that lofty position, which clothes with honour all on whom I choose to smile—it is now, Maria—now that I proclaim thee the mistress of this splendid palace, which you came to visit as a stranger—it is now that I hail thee Archduchess of the German Empire!”

We must pass over the scene of tenderness and joy which ensued.

“And think not,” continued the Archduke, “that I wedded thee under a false name. No—the priest who united us was made acquainted with the secret of my rank; and the holy register is signed with the name which my illustrious father gave me. And now come with me: let us return to the saloon whence opens the door of the Chamber of the Cradle.”

Leopold (Charles Hamel now no more) took the hand of his charming wife, and conducted her to the Hall of Ceremonies.

The folding-doors were open; and the saloon was thronged by the male and female scions of the noblest houses of Germany.

Then, as Leopold led the beautiful and blushing Maria to the dais at the upper end of the hall, the musqueteers, who were arranged along the walls, presented arms, and every plumed hat was doffed, while the ladies' heads bent low, to welcome the illustrious bride and bridegroom to their palace-home.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE TWO FAMILIES.

IN the meantime, the Count and Countess of Aurana were installed in their splendid mansion at a short distance from Vienna.

The Demon, in his poetical description of the edifice and its circumjacent land, had in no way exaggerated the luxuriousness of the former, nor the beauty of the latter.

And Theresa was happy—oh! supremely happy in the society of her husband.

Faust communicated to her the real name and rank of him whom she had known as Charles Hamel; and the amiable daughter of the Lord of Rosenthal, so far from being jealous of the good fortune of the beautiful Maria, rejoiced that such destinies had been in store for her.

It may be well supposed that the two families were intimate: the Archduke felt that he was under the deepest obligations to Faust, who had twice saved his life; and Maria was never wearied of proving to Theresa her gratitude for the kindness which she, when an unprotected orphan, had received from the late Baroness of Rosenthal, and which Theresa had continued towards her.

Thus the Count and Countess of Aurana were frequent visitors at the archducal palace; and now and then Leopold, accompanied by Maria, honoured the mansion of the Count with their presence.

The Emperor Maximilian approved of the matrimonial connection which his nephew Leopold had formed; for the sovereign loved his relative too sincerely to question the propriety of an union which had contributed so much to the young prince's happiness.

Thus nothing seemed wanting to promote the felicity of the two families.

But, alas! an undying worm was gnawing at the heart of Faust—an unquenchable fire was consuming his inmost soul.

Nevertheless, he veiled his grief from Theresa so effectually, that she never perceived a cloud hang upon his brow; and in his love he found a solace which mitigated the sting of that worm, and subdued the fierceness of that undying flame.

Still, how bitter a pang shot to the heart of the unhappy Faust, when his Theresa, a few months after their marriage, held out to him the fondest hopes that their union would soon be blessed with a pledge of their affection.

And how different were the sensations of the Archduke Leopold when his well-beloved Maria made to him a similar avowal!

Faust sought an excuse to retire to his private apartment, where he for some hours abandoned himself to despair.

“Oh! what a wretch am I!” he exclaimed, dashing his open palm violently against his forehead; “my child—the child which Theresa bears in her bosom—is foredoomed! Monster that I am! in order to gratify my own

selfish passions, I have entailed misery—eternal misery—upon an innocent being, who has yet to see the light, but who will not have asked to be born! Madman—fool that I was! Oh! it is too hard that my punishment should commence in this life—I who am to undergo such dread torments hereafter! Oh! that I could pray—that I could pray to Heaven to redeem me from this abyss of indescribable woe! Yes—an idea strikes me! I will seek out some holy priest, and pour forth my soul into his heart;—not one of those pampered abbots, or mitred prelates, who, beneath their sacred garb, conceal the hearts of voluptuaries, and all the sentiments of worldly selfishness! No—I will find some pious father of the church—some poor curate, whose patriarchal life is passed in deeds of charity and ways of peace—or some lonely anchorite, who, afar from men, and the scenes of this busy existence, dwells in a cave, his drink water, and his food fruits! Yes, to such an one will I hasten, and to him will I unburden myself! Oh! I must save my child—I must save the innocent being that will some day call me ‘father!’”

“And the moment that thou settest thy foot on the threshold of the holy curate’s dwelling, or at the entrance of the pious anchorite’s cave, thou art lost—lost according to our agreement!” said the deep, sonorous voice of the Demon.

“What! dost thou come uncalled?” exclaimed Faust, maddened with rage and despair. “Wherefore thus intrude thyself upon my presence?”

“I come to congratulate thee on the prospect of thy paternity,” answered the Demon, in that cold and mocking manner which had before irritated his victim almost beyond the bounds of endurance.

“Ah! now you would revile me—now you taunt me with my misery—now you make me feel all the hideous weight of that serpent-coil which you have fastened around me!” ejaculated Faust, almost foaming with rage. “Avant! infernal miscreant, that knows no mercy—avant, I say!”

Then, as the Demon did not move, Faust drew his sword, and rushing towards him, cried—

“Thou urgest me to desperation. Draw—defend yourself—I must rid myself of thee, or perish at once!”

And blinded by his rage, the Count aimed a tremendous blow at the Demon.

The fiend merely waved his arm contemptuously, and the weapon was snapped in two.

“Fond fool, knowest thou not my power?—thinkest thou that I am mortal, like those earthly babes for whose play such toys as that which now lies broken at thy feet were made? Ah! would that I were indeed susceptible of the death which overtakes them!” added the Demon, his sardonic tone suddenly changing to one of profound melancholy.

“Yes—I am indeed a fond fool to imagine that I can rid myself of thee!” cried Faust, throwing himself upon a sofa, and burying his face in his hands.

The Demon stood contemplating him for a moment, his melancholy expression having again changed to one of infernal triumph and malignant spite, and then the fiend slowly withdrew.

Some time elapsed, and Faust was aroused from his painful reverie by the announcement of the Archduke.

“My dear Count,” said Leopold, “my beloved Maria and myself have taken your mansion by storm—knowing, however, that we shall be welcome. The Archduchess is with your Theresa; and I insisted upon seeing you in your own apartment. The truth is,” continued Leopold, throwing himself upon a sofa, “I am so truly happy, I could not rest until I communicated the cause of that felicity to my friend—for I consider you my friend, Count—one of my dearest and best friends.”

“And I rejoice in being thus honoured by the favour of your highness,” answered Faust, who, according to usage, had shaken off all traces of despair and anguish the moment a visitor was announced.

“Yes—I am indeed happy,” proceeded Leopold. “The Archduchess is in a way to become a mother!”

“Indeed, my lord!” cried Faust, “I sincerely congratulate you; and the more so, as our joy is mutual, and for the same reason.”

“Then will my wild dream become fulfilled yet!” ejaculated the Archduke. “Do you know, Faust,” he added, after a pause, “that I last night fancied that our wives became mothers on the same day—yours of a daughter, mine of a son. Then, in a moment, whole years seemed to pass away; and I beheld them grown up in beauty—the pride of their parents. Again the scene changed, and I dreamt that my son led your daughter to

the altar; and I was happy, for I thought within myself, ‘The friendship of the parents is perpetuated in the union of the children!’”

“Nothing would give me greater happiness than to see such a result,” answered Faust, a melancholy idea starting into his mind, as he thought of the different destinies which awaited the first-born of himself and of the prince.

“Oh! what a bright moment will that be for me!” continued the Archduke, “when I see my own—Maria’s infant conveyed into the Chamber of the Cradle. Ah! there are no precautions that I will not adopt to prevent the cheat that was attempted in respect to myself at my birth—should any evil-disposed person be inclined to practise it.”

“I do not understand your highness,” answered Faust, whose curiosity was aroused by this observation.

“Then you have never heard that singular tale,” said the Archduke. “I was relating it to Maria some months ago—the day I conducted her to the palace, which has since been her home. And, by the bye, I understood afterwards from the Baron of Rosenthal, that the chief judge was relating it on that festive evening when the dread summons of the Cord and Dagger interrupted the harmony of the festival;—but you and I were so occupied with that paper which I signed, and concerning which, in order to keep the secret of my rank, you invented so admirable a tale relative to the speed of your friend to Vienna and back—we were so occupied, I say, that we did not know what was passing at the upper end of the room. I will, however, relate to you the story of the Chamber of the Cradle; and we will then join the Princess and your amiable Countess.”

Leopold accordingly detailed those particulars concerning the Chamber of the Cradle with which the reader is already acquainted.

Faust listened with attention; and, as the narrative proceeded, his countenance was lighted up with joy, as if some new and felicitous idea had struck him.

When the Archduke had brought his history to an end, they both repaired to the saloon, where Theresa and Maria were engaged in pleasing discourse.

The remainder of the day was passed in recreation suited to the rank and tastes of the two families.

But the narrative of the Chamber of the Cradle was uppermost in the imagination of the soul-doomed Faust.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE ORANGERY.

POSSESSION had robbed of its romance the ardent passion which Faust had originally experienced for Theresa.

He still loved—still respected her: he entertained for her the most sincere friendship; and, as he would not willingly have done ought to interfere with the fond dream of her happiness, so he would also have resented with the most signal vengeance the slightest wrong which another might offer her.

But his soul was restless—his mind unsettled. In pleasure alone did he feel relief from the dread secret of his fate,—that secret which he was compelled to retain in his own breast, and which he dared not relieve of a portion of its pangs by imparting it to another!

His mansion was the scene of constant festivities. The proudest and richest nobles of Vienna sought his friendship; and their wives and daughters were equally sedulous in cultivating that of Theresa.

There were two circumstances which struck with surprise not only this charming lady herself, but also the whole circle of Faust’s acquaintance, including the Archduke and Maria.

These were, firstly, the fact that there was no resident chaplain in the establishment of the Count of Aurana; and, secondly, that he himself was never seen in a place of worship.

Every individual of wealth and rank at that time maintained a chaplain in his household; and those families whose means were inconsistent with such an expense, were attended by a confessor. Thus the absence of so necessary an appendage of rank, and so important a guarantee of piety, as a resident priest at the chateau of Aurana, was well calculated to excite astonishment.

Maria hinted to Theresa in the most delicate manner in the world, the nature of the observations which reached her ears on this subject; and the Countess of Aurana promised to speak to Faust relative to so important a matter.

Accordingly, one morning, when they were sitting in a

saloon that commanded a view of the finest part of the estate, on which, however, the groves had lost their verdure and the plants their flowers,—for it was now winter.—Theresa took her husband's hand, and gazing tenderly on his countenance, said, "On Sunday next the Archbishop of Vienna presides at mass in the cathedral of Saint Stephen: shall we not attend the holy ceremony together—to implore the blessings of Heaven upon the future destinies of our babe who is yet unborn?"

"Theresa, you can accompany the Archduchess to Saint Stephen's," answered Faust, hastily. "I shall not be able to attend the ceremony next Sunday."

"Forgive me, Wilhelm," said Theresa, a tear trembling on her long lashes,—*"forgive me if I importune you on this subject; but since the day when our hands were united by my father's chaplain, we have never once appeared together at the altar of the Highest, to return thanks for the blessings which He has so profusely showered upon us."*

"Theresa, I believe that you are regular in your devotion: you can pray for me," answered Faust, with a satirical smile.

"Oh! treat not sacred matters so lightly," exclaimed the Countess. "Remember how hopeless was our prospect but six months ago,—and how strangely—how signally Providence interfered to bless us! You escaped the death which the chief judge had reserved for you;—you escaped from your dungeon at the moment when the scaffold was erected to receive you! Oh! I shudder when I think of the perils that environed you, but which the hand of the Almighty dispersed from around you! Then that same All-wise, All-powerful Being sent you a friend—as you have often told me—who lavished his gold to purchase for you rank and wealth;—at the same moment the Archduke resigned his claims to me; and a variety of circumstances contributed to induce my father to consent to our union!"

"Well—well, Theresa," said Faust, somewhat impatiently; "I know all this! Wherefore recapitulate events which are so deeply engraven in the memories of us both?"

"Because I would remind thee, my well-beloved—my worshipped husband," replied Theresa,—*"I would remind thee that all those circumstances which combined to make us happy, must have been the results of Providential commands! Oh! it would be impious—it would be mad to suppose that mere chance or accident thus favoured us! No—no: I see the finger of Heaven in it all—"*

"Theresa! Theresa!" ejaculated Faust, goaded almost to desperation by this language—a language to respond to which with sincere sympathy he would have given worlds.

"Why do you thus turn away from me? why did your countenance wear an expression of fear—nay almost horror, when you thus wildly mentioned my name twice?" asked Theresa, detaching her husband's hand and pressing it tenderly. "Oh! tell me—do you not believe in that Omnipotent Being who rules the heaven and the earth, which He made with his own hand?"

"Believe!" repeated Faust. "Oh! yes—Theresa: I believe—and tremble!"

"Thank God for that avowal!" cried Theresa earnestly. "Thou believest—and thou tremblest! So does every pious Christian; and, although I would not have my husband an illiberal bigot, nor one who deems it necessary to pass away his life in sackcloth and ashes,—shrinking from innocent pleasure as if a serpent lurked beneath every fair flower which God has thrown upon the earth;—still do I implore thee to pay those devotions which manifest gratitude for present enjoyments, and which ensure a continuation of Heaven's favour."

"Well—well, Theresa," answered Faust, cruelly embarrassed by this conversation; "I will gratify thee in this respect—to the utmost of my power. But on Sunday next I cannot accompany thee. Another time—on some future occasion—when I have nothing to occupy me—"

And Faust, bewildered by the shallowness of his excuses, hastily disengaged his hand from the tender grasp of his wife, and left the room.

He hurried to the garden in the rear of the mansion—for he felt the want of air.

His emotions almost stifled him.

"Accursed being that I am!" he murmured to himself; "shall my breath now poison the purity of that angelic creature's devotions? Must she learn to look upon me as an infidel—an unbeliever? or shall I confess to her that I am an outcast from heaven's mercy? No—

no: that may never be! Oh! when she attributed, in the fervour of her grateful piety, our union and my elevation to rank and fortune,—when she attributed all the prosperity which we enjoy, to the bounty of Heaven, how my heart sank within me—how every pulse palpitated violently—how my brain throbbed,—for I felt as if some terrible voice would thunder the dread truth in her ears, and dissipate her error—that error which makes her cast her adoring glances upon HEAVEN as the source of the happiness which she enjoys, whereas it all springs from the agency of HELL! Oh! wretched—thrice wretched mortal that I am!"

And Faust ground his teeth with mingled rage and anguish.

At the extremity of the spacious garden stood a magnificent glass-house, which was termed the orangery. There the citron, the olive, the lime, the orange, and other luxuriant fruits enjoyed a summer climate in the depths of winter; and that warmth, created by artificial means, also nurtured many beautiful flowers.

As Faust passed the orangery, he perceived a female within, and instantly recognised Ida, his wife's principal lady of the bed-chamber.

The maiden was occupied in tending some favourite exotics; and for a few moments she was unaware that any one observed her.

Never until the present occasion had it struck Faust that Ida was very beautiful; but now, as he contemplated her fine oval countenance,—as his glance swept her tall and elegantly modelled figure,—and as he marked her long black lashes resting on her cheeks, as she looked down upon her flowers—while her pouting lips, apart, revealed teeth white as orient pearls,—his soul was inflamed—his heart palpitated.

Suddenly the maiden raised her eyes, and encountered the ardent glances which were rivetted upon her.

A deep blush suffused her countenance; and her looks fell—but not instantaneously:—rapid as lightning, those orbs darted a glance of mingled joy and hope upon the Count, ere they were veiled by their dark-fringed lids.

That glance which she threw upon Faust seemed to express any sentiment rather than anger at the impassioned manner in which he was contemplating her.

He hesitated for a moment: then he entered the orangery.

"The fairest flowers around thee are not more charming than thyself, sweet Ida," said Faust, approaching the maiden, and regarding her tenderly.

"My lord!" murmured Ida, a deep blush again overspreading her countenance.

"Nay—believe me, I think so," continued Faust, taking her hand, which she abandoned to him with but a feeble struggle to withdraw it. "Is it possible to see thee once without being anxious to see thee again? and can there be a heart so cold as not to warm with tenderness for thee, sweet damsel, when living beneath the same roof as thyself?"

"Oh! my lord, your words are traitorous to the lady whom it is my good fortune to serve," said Ida; "and what opinion could you form of me if I were to listen to them with a smile?"

"I should esteem myself happy—thrice happy, dearest Ida—for thou art adorable!" replied Faust, raising her hand to his lips.

"My lord—my lord!" faltered Ida; "you are endeavouring to put my virtue to a test—you are anxious to convince yourself that I am one deserving the honour of being the companion of your lady. Leave me, my lord—this is cruel!"

And tears trickled down her cheeks.

"No—by my honour, you misunderstand me, Ida," exclaimed Faust: "I love you—I love you!"

"Oh! if that were true!" murmured Ida: and she raised her eyes, melting with love, and their lustre subdued by tears, towards the countenance of Faust.

"True! it is as true as that you are lovely!" cried Faust. "And now, may I—without vanity—explain the manner in which I read the glances that your beauteous eyes threw upon me—the mode in which I interpret that sigh—the meaning I attach to the trembling of that soft hand which I hold in mine,—may I hope, Ida, that you do not survey me with aversion?"

"Ah! my lord," answered the blushing girl; "it is indeed too true that I do not look upon you with aversion! Were I wise—were I prudent—were I strong, I should tear myself away from you; but, alas! my lord—I am foolish—I am imprudent—I am weak:—and now you know my secret!"



Her head drooped upon her breast, as she uttered these words in a tremulous and plaintive tone.

"You love me, Ida—you love me!" exclaimed Faust, clasping her in his arms, while she fondly returned his caresses.

"Yes—I love you—I have long loved you," murmured the beautiful girl. "Oh! what opinion must you form of me now?"

"Listen!" cried Faust, suddenly disengaging himself from her embrace, and retreating a step or two: then, as he fixed his eyes upon her with a burning glance which denoted other emotions besides love and tenderness, he said in a low, measured, and solemn tone, "Ida, you are the being who can impart some happiness to my existence. Do not interrupt me: you are surprised that I should even hint at such a thing as infelicity—I who to the world seem amongst the most favoured of that world's denizens! But it is so. Here—here, Ida," he continued, striking his hand violently upon his heart,—"here does a worm prey upon my vitals—here does an unquenchable flame torture me, unseen—unknown—unfelt by all save me! I love Theresa—I love her as a friend, as one who loves me well and faithfully! But she could not be my confidant: my secret would poison her young life—harrow up her gentle soul—blast her as with lightning! And yet I need one into whose ear I could pour the dread narrative of my fate,—one who would not loathe, but who would comfort me,—one who would not shrink from the dread secret which is too heavy for me to bear alone! Oh! Ida—can you be all this to me? If so, I can love you too! Love you, do I say? Oh! I could worship—I could adore you; for the love which I should bear for you would be of a nature so different from that which I experience for Theresa—dependent on principles so distinct—confirmed by bonds so strange and solemn—that you would be happy, and I should be consoled,—and there would exist between us a mysterious intimacy—a wild and romantic attachment, wherein there would be much that was terrible as well as much that was charming and delicious!"

"My lord, you alarm me!" exclaimed Ida, gazing upon him in an affrighted manner, as if she were afraid that his reason was deserting him.

"Oh! if you quail now, you would never have courage to hear that dread secret which must kill me ere my time, if I thus continue to nurse it without a friend to whom I can impart it! For know you not that man finds solace in confiding to one who loves him the sources of his sorrows?"

"Fear not that I shall tremble," answered Ida. "You know not the firmness—the strength of my soul! Love alone subdues me; but had you an enemy, and did you place a dagger in my hand, saying, 'Ida, prove to me thy love!' I would plunge the weapon to the hilt in your foeman's heart! Does my voice tremble now? do my lips quiver as I thus address thee? If so, then taunt me with boasting of a courage which I do not possess: but if not, then tell me that I am worthy of your confidence."

Faust contemplated her with admiration for some moments: then, clasping her in his arms, he said, "Yes, dearest—beloved Ida, thou art worthy of my confidence!"

And he embraced her with ardour.

"But not here—not here," he continued, after a long pause:—"not here, in the light of day, must that dread secret be revealed to you. No—the dark night alone is fitted for such a tale as that which I have to breathe into your ears! Ida, my adored one," added Faust, "thou must meet me to-night—in Vienna—at the gate of St. Stephen's Cathedral; and let the hour be twelve. Hast thou the courage?"

"You shall see," returned the maiden, firmly. "At twelve—near St. Stephen's gate? I will be there."

"Till then, farewell, sweet Ida!" exclaimed Faust.

"Adieu, my well-beloved!" answered the fair one.

They embraced each other tenderly, and then separated.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE SECRET.

THE night was dark and stormy.

The wind howled around the ramparts and whistled through the streets of Vienna: dark clouds rolled rapidly along on the face of heaven, obscuring moon and stars.

The huge trees on the fortifications bent their proud heads, their mighty arms creaking ominously; while the wind moaned gloomily amidst the branches which stern winter had robbed of their foliage.

The Stephen's-platz, or square in which the cathedral stands, was deserted.

The mighty edifice seemed built of black marble, so sombre and gloomy was its appearance, dimly shadowed forth as it was, in the almost complete obscurity of the night. The spire,—not built upon a tower, but rising from the ground to a height of five hundred feet,—was lost amidst the murky clouds.

A few minutes before midnight a female, enveloped in a dark cloak, stopped near the front entrance of the cathedral.

Almost immediately afterwards, a man, also wrapped in a mantle, arrived at the same spot.

"Ida!" said the latter, halting.

"Faust!" returned the maiden.

"Thou art a brave and courageous girl," answered Faust. "Say—does the darkness of the night alarm thee? Has the moaning of the wind terrors for thine ears?"

"Were I afraid, I should not for a moment do violence to my feelings by remaining here," replied Ida: "neither should I have come at all, had I experienced the least failing at my heart."

"Excellent girl!" cried Faust: "thou art indeed the being that I can love with all the wildest—maddest—most frenzied excess of passion! But wilt thou accompany me whithersoever I shall lead?"

"I came for that purpose," answered Ida. "I love you—that is sufficient. Lead on."

Faust proceeded round the cathedral, until he reached the houses at the back of the edifice.

He paused at a low door, which he opened; and, closely followed by Ida, he hurried up a narrow passage at the end of which was another door, Ida having shut the first one behind her.

This second door was opened by Faust; and when Ida had crossed the threshold, he seized her by the arm, saying, "Pause for a few moments: there is a flight of stone steps at your feet."

Faust then closed the door; and taking from beneath his cloak a species of lantern, he lighted it immediately—but by what means Ida could not perceive.

And now the feeble light of that lantern threw out a sickly glare amidst the dense obscurity of the place.

The atmosphere was damp and fetid; it seemed to be laden with an odour as of the decomposing dead.

"Will you descend these stairs with me, dearest Ida?" asked Faust, holding down the light so that she could perceive a narrow flight of steps leading down into an abyss whose depths were lost in total darkness.

For one single instant the maiden hesitated: then in a firm tone, she answered, "I will accompany you whithersoever you may desire."

"Ida—Ida!" ejaculated Faust, in a tone of mingled sorrow and reproach: "you hesitated!"

"Pardon me that moment of weakness—it is past, and cannot—shall not return! Here—take my hand—feel, does it tremble?"

"No, dearest," answered Faust.

"And does my voice indicate fear?" asked Ida.

"Those tones are as firm and yet as soft and melodious as the most ravishing music," said Faust. "Ida—I adore you. Come on."

They slowly descended the steps together, Faust carrying the light which only tended to make the darkness more visible.

As they drew near the bottom of the steps, the fetid odour before noticed became more powerful, and more nauseous. At length they reached a narrow passage, which soon turned abruptly round to the right; and then they found themselves at the top of another flight of steps, wider and more conveniently built than the former.

The odour now became more and more intense.

"This is a gloomy place—far in the bowels of the earth, Ida," observed Faust.

"The way that leads in, also leads out, dearest Wilhelm," answered the heroic girl, calmly.

"True," rejoined Faust. "We shall retrace our steps presently."

"Not before you have told me everything," said Ida.

"No—you shall learn all—all," answered her companion.

They had now reached the bottom of the steps; and a few paces brought them to the entrance of a large square vault.

"Now, Ida—will you come farther with me? or will you retreat at once—and forget that I ever spoke to you of the secret which I nurse?" demanded Faust.



"I love you, Wilhelm; and I must know all."

These words were uttered with a firmness and decision which banished all hesitation on the part of the Count of Aurland.

"Then behold the place where my secret must be revealed to you, Ida!" he exclaimed.

At the same time he advanced into the vault, holding the lantern low, in order that its light might fall upon the horrors of the subterranean.

Ida kept by his side, and did not shrink from the contemplation of those horrors!

Horrors!—Stretched upon the stone floor, in careless confusion, were multitudes of corpses—naked, uncoffined, ghastly!

For Ida and her companion were now in the catacombs of St. Stephen's.

The decomposition which almost invariably follows death, had not occurred in that place; and the skin had become dry, and resembled in colour and substance well-tanned leather. Here, however, an arm was broken off—there a leg: in some instances a head lay separated from the trunk—and in others a trunk had lost its head.

The lips had shrunk away from the teeth, which were left exposed; and the bodies seemed to grin horribly at those who now invaded their place of rest.

In their death, they all appeared alive!

"Ida, dost thou tremble now?" asked Faust, when a sufficient time had elapsed to permit her to contemplate the full extent of the horrors of that vault.

"No," answered the heroic girl; "I have ever entertained more fear of the living than of the dead."

"Then let us seat ourselves on this stone bench," said Faust; "and I will communicate to you that dread secret which fills my soul! For you have declared that you love me, Ida—and I love you; and when you are acquainted with the cause of that unhappiness at which I have only as yet darkly hinted, you will see how much I need the consolation of a strong and powerful mind like yours! But first let me tell you why I brought you hither,—here, amidst these dread epitomes of mortality, it was because my secret is one which is calculated to freeze the blood in the veins of the timid—to make the hair stand on end with horror—to strike as it were with a barbed arrow into the profound recesses of the heart. I brought you hither to try your courage—to put your strength of soul to the severest test which I could imagine—to accustom you to the horrible, that you might be the better nerved to hear the terrible! This test you have withstood bravely, Ida! Moreover, mine is a secret which could not be breathed at mid-day, when the glorious sun is shining in all its splendour; nor in the open air, at night, when a listener might be near and yet unobserved. No:—a charnel house—the abode of death—the place where all the hideous relics of mortality are huddled thus confusedly together,—such is the fitting scene for a revelation like the one I am now about to make to thee!"

"I am prepared to hear thee, Faust: speak on," said Ida, in a firm and decided tone.

Faust placed the lantern on the ground, and taking Ida in his arms, pressed his lips to hers.

"Here shalt thou swear, beloved one," he cried, "that what I am about to tell thee shall never pass thy lips save in converse with me; here shalt thou swear that not to thy confessor—no, nor even wast thou on thy dying bed—wilt thou breathe a syllable of the dread secret which I am now to communicate to thee! Here also shalt thou swear to love me—to be mine—wholly, solely mine,—to solace me in my dark hours and gloomy moods with the sweet melody of thy voice,—to give me thine heart unalterably, devotedly."

"Oh! my adored Wilhelm," exclaimed Ida. "I swear to keep thy secret even were I stretched upon the rack; and, as for loving thee, heaven knows how sincerely—how madly I love thee, my worshipped one! If the secret you are now about to impart to me be one that must teach me henceforth to look upon thee as a murderer,—if the hand which I now press be stained with human blood—oh! even then I could not love thee less! For mine, Faust, is a proud and a haughty mind, which would not shrink from aught that might serve my purposes or enhance my ideas of happiness. Only with you—in loving you, and in being beloved by you in return,—only in this am I a weak, frail, and gentle woman! And now thou knowest me, my Faust—thou canst comprehend me! Hesitate no longer to make me thy confidant."

"Listen, then," said Faust, after a long pause, and now speaking in a low and thick tone, as if his throat

were parched; "listen—and you shall know all. But a few months ago I was a poor student—friendless—almost penniless. I was in prison and doomed to death. I loved Theresa—but not as I now love thee, my sweet Ida;—nevertheless I loved her, and I longed to possess her. Then I thirsted for revenge on those who had persecuted me; for it was the Baron himself who was the author of my imprisonment."

"The Baron!" exclaimed Ida, in surprise.

"Yes—the proud Baron, who would not that I should be united to his daughter. But I have never breathed to Theresa this fact. Why should I render her unhappy, since she loves me so well? I had, then, to save my life—to render my love successful—and to gratify my revenge! Oh! Ida—can you be surprised if in a moment of anguish, of ambition, and of irresistible temptation,—the gibbet here, and boundless wealth and power there,—on one side all darkness, on the other all light,—racked by a thousand conflicting emotions that bewildered me;—can you be surprised, Ida, if in such a moment as that I consigned my soul to Satan?"

"No—no, Faust!" ejaculated Ida, a shudder passing over her as these terrific words met her ears; "oh! no—it cannot be!"

"What! do you already loathe me?" cried the Count of Aurland bitterly.

"Again I say no—no," answered Ida. "Be you what you may, I have sworn to love you; and, even without the oath, my heart would remain unalterably yours. There—by that kiss, Wilhelm, I renew my vow in all its solemnity."

"Pardon me for mistrusting you, Ida," said Faust. "Now you can comprehend why the undying worm preys ever upon my vitals—why the quenchless fire creates unceasing pangs in my heart's core. Now you can understand why I need consolation! Oh! Ida, could I recall the past—could I return to my dungeon in Wittenberg, thence to pass forth to the scaffold,—and annul that dread contract which makes me SATAN'S OWN—how gladly would I make the exchange! For four-and-twenty years is the Demon my slave; but when the clock strikes the last hour of that period, he becomes my master for all eternity! That is my secret."

"You are a bold and a great man, Faust, thus to have soared beyond the limited privileges and narrow circumference of power allotted to mortals," said Ida; "and I admire thee—yes, I admire thee, my adored one! Oh! now admiration is united to love; and I am thine—thine wholly and solely!"

"The ardour of your passion consoles me more than I can express," exclaimed Faust. "But let me tell thee all—for there is worse yet to reveal. My compact with the Evil One permits me not to enter any place of worship, nor the residence of a minister of God. To possess Theresa, I was forced to wed her; my arts could not prevail upon her to entrust her fate into my hands, unless her father sanctioned and the priest blessed our union. Then, Ida, to obtain the consent of the Demon to my appearance at the altar on that one occasion—that one occasion only—oh! I agreed to a fearful price—I pledged the soul of my first-born son!"

"Frightful alternative!" cried the maiden.

"Frightful indeed. Pray, Ida—pray to Heaven—for thou canst pray, and I dare not—that the child which Theresa bears in her breast be of your own sex!"

"I will pray night and morning," answered Ida, enthusiastically.

"And for me also," added Faust, mournfully; "though prayers and masses will be, I fear, but of small avail in my behalf! But now let us depart, Ida: thou knowest my secret—and thou wilt love me not the less on that account!"

"Oh! I love thee the more devotedly—the more earnestly—the more fervently," returned Ida, throwing her arms around his neck.

They embraced each other tenderly, and then retraced their steps away from the dread vaults of death.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE BROTHER.

THREE months after the incidents related in the preceding chapter, a young man,—whose shabby attire denoted great poverty, and who, by the soiled condition of that miserable clothing, had evidently walked a considerable distance,—arrived in the neighbourhood of Aurland mansion.

His countenance was handsome, though careworn; and neither privation nor mental suffering had dimmed the lustre of his dark black eyes.

It was evening when, cold, hungry, and sinking with fatigue, he opened a small wicket in the park-railings, and threaded a path leading to the back premises of the Château of Aurana.

"Thirty miles have I toiled this day to reach the place of my destination," he said to himself, as he dragged his almost sinking form along; "thirty long miles—with no other refreshment than the icy water of the brook by the road-side. And twenty, or twenty-five miles on each of many preceding days have I toiled on in the same manner! But my spirits have not sunk within me—neither has my courage drooped! No—for I have been sustained by the hope that when I reach Aurana, I shall find one who will not let me starve! Oh! had my own laborious exertions sufficed to give me bread, I would have died sooner than seek the aid of another—even though that other be my sister! For I know her proud and haughty disposition—I know her ambitious and aspiring mind! Still must her heart warm towards her brother! Yes—she will welcome me with smiles; and, even should the Count choose to forget his late college-friend, my sister has the means of giving me bread! My poor mother! Three weeks only have elapsed since I closed thine eyes,—three short weeks since thou wast consigned to the tomb! Oh! how I wept and prayed—and prayed and wept by turns over the cold grave where thou art laid! And all I possessed I sold to bury thee! Oh! my mother—if the spirits of the departed be indeed allowed to look down from the mansions of the blest, and watch the career of those whom they loved on earth—how wilt thou be afflicted to contemplate the sad position of thy son! And yet it is not idleness that has made me penniless and clothed me in rags: it is not debauchery nor extravagance that has reduced me to the verge of mendicancy! No—misfortune alone is my evil genius; and—poor, beggared, wretched though I am—I can look the world in the face, and declare that my character is without a stain!"

Thus mused the unhappy traveller as he advanced towards the Château of Aurana.

Darkness now prevailed around; but his steps were guided by the brilliant lights that shone through the casements of the lordly mansion.

The traveller reached a lofty iron railing, which separated the park from the gardens of the château. The perpendicular bars of this railing were fashioned like spears, the heads whereof were gilt.

Along this barrier the traveller dragged himself, until he reached a gate which was fortunately unlocked.

"This is a good omen," said the traveller, as he entered the garden. "Heaven grant that my sister may receive me with a smile! And, oh! if her heart be like mine in respect to filial affection, how will she mourn over the memory of her mother—that mother who is now no more!"

Thus musing again, the young man continued his way amidst plants and evergreens which defied the ravaging hand of winter. When within a hundred yards of the château, the traveller beheld a solitary light at a little distance on his left hand.

He immediately concluded that this gleam, detached as it was from the brilliant galaxy of lights which shone from the casements of the mansion straight before him, emanated from some outhouse, where he might make the inquiries concerning his sister.

He accordingly advanced in the direction of that single light, and speedily ascertained that it came from the upper window of a pavilion which stood alone, and near a small lake, in the midst of the spacious gardens.

The door of the pavilion was unfastened: and he entered without obstacle.

But no sooner had he crossed the threshold than he paused:—might he not be intruding upon the privacy of the occupant of that pavilion? Would not his presence there be attended with suspicions of a derogatory nature?

He hesitated!

"And yet," he said to himself, "I cannot present myself in this sorry plight at the door of yonder mansion. The proud soul of my sister would shrink from the idea that a wretch like me—with matted hair, haggard look, tattered raiment, and broken shoes—came to claim her as a near relative! I am hungry, too—I am starving: I am faint and weary! Yes—I will make my inquiries here!"

Then he slowly ascended a staircase which led to a landing whence a single door opened.

He was about to knock at that door, when the sound of a well-known voice within met his ear.

"What would you have me do, Ida?" said the Count of Aurana.

"Faust—Ida—here together!" murmured the stranger to himself.

And then he listened attentively.

"Oh! my beloved one," returned Ida, "you must save me from this disgrace."

"But how? speak!" returned Faust. "Perchance you have some plan uppermost in your mind. Name it! You know my wealth—you know my power. Tell me, beloved Ida, what can I do to serve thee in this emergency?"

"My shame must be concealed—and yet I have no plan," answered Ida. "No—you mistake me: I seek counsel at your hands, and have not a suggestion to offer."

"There are but two schemes to adopt, dearest," said Faust. "Either you must leave this neighbourhood and seek retirement—some time hence, when it will be impossible to conceal your condition longer; or else I must find some youth of good name but of small fortune, who, in consideration of the handsome dower which I can give thee, will espouse thee!"

"The latter plan pleases me best, beloved Faust," answered Ida. "Yes—be it as you say. There is no want of titled paupers in Vienna, who, to reconstruct their fortunes, will gladly embrace the opportunity—no matter what the condition be. Then, also, dear Faust," she added, in an impassioned tone, "we need not be separated for ever!"

"True, Ida: for you are well aware that in two months' time I shall require your aid in that project which we have arranged, and which, should accident permit both events to take place at the same time, will—"

The traveller, who listened outside the door, was unable to catch the remainder of this sentence.

And what of that traveller now?

When first he had become convinced that Ida and Faust were together, he was seized with such sudden surprise, that, forgetting his naturally noble principles, he became transformed into an eavesdropper—a character which in his tranquil moments he would have abhorred.

But there was much excuse for him!

Then, as he listened with breathless attention—anxious, greedy to drink in every word that fell from the lips of the inmates of the room,—the tender terms in which those inmates addressed each other, struck him as with a thunderbolt—transfixed him—rivetted him to the spot. But when Ida avowed her shame in terms too unequivocal to be mistaken—a cold perspiration burst out upon the brow of the unhappy stranger: his knees bent beneath him—a sickness, a faintness, a dizziness came over him;—and, had he not suddenly exerted an almost superhuman effort over himself, both mentally and bodily, he would have fallen heavily on the floor.

Then the conversation was continued, as above related; and once more the stranger listened attentively.

"Yes," continued Faust, "you will be enabled to conceal your situation until then. And now that I reflect upon the plan which I ere now proposed to save you from eventual disgrace, I remember a certain Baron von Czernin, who will—"

At that moment the door flew open; and the traveller—pale, haggard, but infuriated with rage—burst upon the guilty pair.

"My brother!" shrieked Ida, sinking from the arms of Faust, and falling on the carpet at the foot of the ottoman on which they had been sitting together.

"Otto Pianalla!" ejaculated Faust, instinctively springing from the voluptuous cushions, and laying his hand upon his sword.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE PAVILION.

THE reader may more easily conceive, than we can describe, the painful situation in which the three persons in the pavilion were plunged at that meeting with which we closed the preceding chapter.

Faust beheld before him a young man who was once his friend, but who had been dishonoured and outraged, in the person of his sister;—Ida, awaking to the consciousness of her shame, saw the pale, wasted, but wrathful countenance of her brother gazing on her with an expression which struck terror to her soul;—and Otto himself

was labouring under the appalling conviction that his sister—that sister whom he so tenderly loved—was a wanton, lost to honour and to virtue.

At length Otto sank upon a seat, covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

Faust, who had expected a manifestation of hostility on the part of his late friend, smiled scornfully, and glanced towards Ida.

But she saw him not: her proud soul was for a moment subdued by the anguish of her brother.

It was evident that he had overheard all!

"Ah! my sister," suddenly exclaimed Otto, turning his tear-bedimmed eyes upon her, "what have I just learnt? I have dragged myself from Wittenberg to Vienna to clasp my sister in my arms:—poor, hungry, way-worn, and with but these scanty garments to protect me from the frosts of winter, I have sustained my oft-sinking courage by the idea that at the end of my journey I should be welcomed by thee! Oh! that hope has consoled me—or I should have died of misery and wretchedness during my long and painful journey. Alas! Ida, when at night I craved a lodging at some peasant's hut, and was repulsed by the rude inhospitable churl, I murmured to myself, '*Thank heaven that Ida knows not a penury like mine!*' Then, when sinking with want, I implored a crust of the shepherd whom I saw tending his flock, and received from him a morsel tossed towards me with a brutality which he would not have shown his dog, I consoled myself with the reflection that '*Ida had bread enough—and to spare!*' Amidst all my privations—all my sorrow—all my sufferings, I have found solace in the thought that '*Ida was with kind and honourable friends, who would protect and cherish the poor orphan!*'"

"Orphan!" exclaimed Ida, whose tears had flowed rapidly while her brother thus addressed her; "orphan!" she repeated, a sudden terror seizing upon her soul:—"yes—I am fatherless—but my mother—"

"Your mother, Ida," returned Otto, in a tone of profound melancholy—"that mother, who, though poor, looked upon her children as treasures of inestimable value, and upon their virtues as gems beyond all price—that poor mother, Ida—"

"Speak, Otto—speak!" cried she, hastening towards him, and clasping his arm convulsively with her hand; "speak—I say—what of my mother?"

"She is no more!" replied Otto; "and God be thanked that she is no longer on that earth which is the scene of her daughter's shame."

"My mother—my dear mother—dead!" ejaculated Ida; and she fell upon her knees, a prey to ineffable anguish.

"Rise, Ida—rise," said her brother; "it is not to me that you must humiliate yourself:—it is to your God."

And lifting her from her suppliant posture, he led her to the ottoman.

"Now, sir—or my lord," added Otto, bitterly, as he addressed himself to Faust, "for I am aware that you are ennobled in name, though debased in nature—my business is with you."

"Otto, my good friend, the past cannot be recalled," said Faust; "but the future is still within the sphere of reparation!"

"Reparation!" exclaimed the young artist, with a scornful emphasis; "dost thou suppose that all the gold which is now in the treasures of man on the surface of the earth, or all which lies yet buried in the depths beneath our feet, can make reparation for that girl's lost honour? Dost thou conceive that all the most precious gems which the greedy hand of mortals has raised from the bosom of the earth, can supply a lustre that may compete with the glorious light of female purity? No, my lord; for when that lamp of chastity is extinguished, the costliest diamonds would shine but dimly in the chamber which that lost honour once made radiant! Such, at least, are my sentiments. 'Tis true, I am in rags—I am poor—I am without a hope; but no wealth that you can confer—no honours that you can bestow, will serve to give back joy to my heart—now that the humble name I bear is tarnished in the person of that wanton, who ere now so coolly plotted with your lordship how she should disguise her shame!"

"These are harsh words, Otto," said Faust; "reflection will make you view the matter in another light."

"Were I to ponder upon all that I have this night learnt—ponder until my imagination sank beneath the weight of thought—ponder until the wing of the spirit was borne down by the deep sense of this calamity, I should not entertain other sentiments than those which I have now expressed. But, I understand you well, my

lord," continued Otto, his cheek flushing, and his eyes flashing fire, as he spoke:—"you think that a great and wealthy noble like yourself can seduce with impunity the poor, humble, dependent minion of his wife! You think that it is a pleasant pastime—and to be remedied by gold! Or, peradventure, you suppose that you even honour me by bestowing your favours upon my sister. Now, it may well suit those fathers or those brothers whose ideas are as abandoned as your own, and whose principles are as heartless, to receive benefits from the hands of those great lords who ruin their daughters and their sisters. Otto Pianalla is not one of those! But why do I stand thus parleying with thee? Thou hast done me this injury—wilt thou make me the reparation which I require?"

"I will—I will," answered Faust. "Name your terms."

"They are these. Give me a cup of wine to restore my fleeting strength for a short space—lend me a sword—and God will grant the victory to him whose cause is the most just."

"Rash youth!" exclaimed Faust, smiling contemptuously; "what do you ask of me? Weak as you are, your life would be at my mercy. It were a murder on my part!"

"The battle is not always to the strong!" said Otto. "You promised to accede to my terms: do you mean to retract your lordly pledge?"

These words were uttered with a bitter and penetrating scorn.

"And should I fall, on the contrary," observed Faust, smiling contemptuously at the mere supposition, "what will become of your sister, Ida?"

"True! I had forgotten," exclaimed Otto, dashing his hand against his forehead. "If I slay thee, false Count, I deprive an unborn babe of its father: if I do not seek to avenge the honour of our name, I am a recreant, deserving only of contempt."

"Listen, Otto," said Faust, who now observed that Ida had gradually dried her tears, and had recovered a portion of her lost courage: "I have done your sister an injury—I will repair it to the utmost of my power. I will provide for her and her child, in any way she may point out."

"To that you pledge yourself?" exclaimed Otto, after a long pause, during which he had remained wrapped up in profound thought.

"I pledge myself," returned Faust.

"Then write what I shall dictate, my lord," said Otto. "You have the materials on the table near you."

Faust, who was anxious to conclude this unpleasant affair without a scandalous exposure which might reach the ears of Theresa, and without being forced to do an injury to the brother of Ida—Faust seated himself at the table, took up a pen, and prepared to write.

Otto advanced, and leant over his shoulder, to be convinced that the Count accurately followed his dictation.

"Write thus, my lord:—

*"I acknowledge myself to be the father of the babe which Ida Pianalla bears in her bosom. I bequeath to her the sum of one thousand crowns, as a means—"*

"Nay—I will write ten thousand," exclaimed Faust, emphatically.

"No, my lord," returned Otto. "She shall not accept wealth at your hands—but merely a bare subsistence for herself and child, until the latter—should it live—be enabled to aid the mother in obtaining the bread of honesty. Proceed, my lord:—

*"As a means of subsistence, and to enable her to rear the offspring of my crime and her weakness in a manner befitting its future interests. And I charge those who may survive me, and who succeed to my wealth, to see this bequest of mine duly fulfilled."*

"Is that all?" asked Faust, somewhat impatiently.

"It is all I desire—saving your signature, my lord," answered Otto.

The Count of Aurana immediately completed the requisite formality. Otto signed the document as a witness; then, carefully folding it, he handed it to his sister, saying, "Keep it, Ida—you know not how soon you may have naught in the world save that bequest to depend upon for your bread."

"What mean those mysterious words?" she exclaimed, as she placed the paper beneath the folds of her garments.

"They mean that his lordship can now give me the satisfaction which I require—a cup of wine, and a sword!" returned Otto, solemnly,

"My dearest brother, do not peril your life for me!" exclaimed Ida, seizing him by the hand;—for strong as the mind of this young female was, still that natural affection which not even savages can entirely subdue in their hearts, and those ties of blood which the most ruthless cannot altogether forget, possessed a softening influence upon her heart.

"Interfere not with the course of that justice which I must render to our name—our dishonoured name!" answered Otto, solemnly; then, turning towards the Count, he said, "Now, my lord, will you grant me the only reparation which I can receive? or shall I provoke you by a blow and a harsh word?"

"Nay—that shall you not!" exclaimed Faust, his own anger now excited. "But, beware, rash young man! In my hands your life is as an infant in the grasp of a giant!"

"I am not to be alarmed by idle threats, my lord," returned Otto, with a smile of contempt.

"Then have your will," said Faust. "In the room beneath there is a cupboard containing choice wines; and on the walls hang weapons of the finest Milan steel. You shall quaff a goblet—which will be your last; and you shall choose a sword—which will not avail you. Then, if thou hast the courage to engage in mortal combat amidst the almost utter darkness of the night, we will seek a secluded spot, where there will be no fear of interruption."

"Be it as you say," said Otto; then, turning towards his sister, he exclaimed, "Farewell, Ida! Be the event of this duel what it may, you will never see me more; for if I survive it, I shall seek some distant clime, where, under another name, I may conceal the one which you have dishonoured. On her death-bed, Ida, your mother blessed you! Treasure that dying proof of your departed parent's tenderness—treasure it as a talisman that may henceforth protect thee from guilt! Farewell, Ida—farewell!"

He bent forward, imprinted one kiss upon his sister's brow, and then turned away.

"My lord," he said, "I am ready to accompany you."

As he uttered these words, he moved towards the door.

Ida sprang after him, exclaiming, "Otto—my brother—my dear brother—I implore thee to beware! Thou knowest not the power of him against whom—"

At that moment, Faust seized her forcibly by the arm, drew her back, whispering at the same time in her ear, "Ida! hast thou forgotten thine oath? Wouldst thou betray me?"

In an instant she became comparatively calm and tranquil: the thoughts and scenes which those words suddenly called up to her imagination, produced an almost paralyzing effect upon her.

"But you will spare him—you will spare him," she murmured in her lover's ear, after a momentary pause, and glancing towards Otto, who was now already in the landing outside the door.

"Yes—yes—Ida—do not fear," answered Faust. "Remain here until my return."

He then hastened after Otto.

Ida retreated to the sofa, and covering her face with her hands, she exclaimed, "My mother is gone for ever; and now—what will become of my brother?"

But, as the reader has already seen, she was not the woman to bow for any length of time beneath the weight of either shame or affliction.

She rose, wiped away her tears, and drawing forth the paper which Faust had signed, she glanced her eyes rapidly over it.

"He acknowledges his child!" she exclaimed. "This document may be of use to me—it may serve to forward my views," she added, speaking slowly, but in an excited tone. "The time is not, however, arrived; no—he must be completely in my power—and then—"

She paused, and smiled complacently.

Her ambition predominated over the idea of her mother's death and her brother's danger.

"Yes, Faust," she continued, "I love thee well—dearly love thee: but through thee must I obtain rank and wealth!—How tediously the time passes!" she added; "surely they must have decided their quarrel ere now! Faust cannot succumb—his terrible power protects him;—but my brother—Otto!—oh no—Faust has promised to spare him!"

Then she approached the window, and gazed upon the brilliantly-illuminated château at a little distance.

"Theresa believes that business of importance has called her husband to Vienna; and she entertains the Archduke and the Archduchess in his absence! To think that the baby-faced Maria should succeed in captivating a prince! Oh! it was *that*—it was *that* which gave me the courage and endowed me with the strength to go through that frightful ordeal in the vaults beneath the Cathedral of St. Stephen—because I saw that Faust had some powerful secret to reveal; and I knew that when he made me his confidant, he would place himself in my power!—But the time passes—and he does not return! What can it mean? For a time the sudden appearance of my brother—then the abrupt announcement of my mother's death—these united to bend my proud spirit. But that weakness is past—and Ida once more dreams only of her ambition!"

Nearly an hour had now passed since Otto and Faust left the pavilion.

But scarcely had Ida reached that climax in her musings, at which she nerved herself with the idea that her ambition should be her only consideration, when a rapid step ascended the stairs; and in a few moments Faust made his appearance.

"Have you spared him?" asked Ida, rushing forward to meet her lover.

"I have—for your sake," replied Faust. "But when my sword was at his throat, I made him vow never to seek to molest us more."

"You acted wisely," observed Ida. "He is honourable—and he will keep his word."

"We must now return to the château," said Faust.

"Do you repair forthwith to your own chamber—I will gain the principal entrance by a circuitous path. Tomorrow evening, dearest, we will converse again upon those plans the discussion of which was interrupted by your brother."

Ida having embraced her lover, threw her mantilla around her, and took her departure towards the mansion.

Faust lingered for a few minutes in the pavilion, and then proceeded, by another path, towards the same point.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE CHAMBER OF THE CRADLE.

SPRING had now returned, and covered the earth with flowers and the trees with verdure.

Again, one evening, were Faust and Ida in earnest conversation in the pavilion.

The rays of the setting sun shone through the casement, upon the guilty pair, as they sat upon the voluptuous ottoman together.

Upon the table were flagons of wine, and crystal dishes full of fruits—the produce of the orangery, or hot-house, where Faust and his frail companion had first exchanged glances of intelligence and passion.

"Thus far, Ida," said Faust, "all our plans have prospered. Theresa is already lodged in the palace of the Archduke, that she may have the benefit of his physician's aid, in case of danger:—and that physician is devoted to my interests! As nearly as can be calculated, the two events will take place about the same time: a few days now must decide it all! Did I not assure thee that I should gain over both those grey-beard physicians as well as the nurse?"

"Nor did I doubt you," answered Ida. "Your inexhaustible wealth could almost purchase Maximilian's crown. But I must not waste my time here, dearest Wilhelm: remember that I am to be at the archducal palace early in the morning, with your lady's jewel-casket and the various articles of her wardrobe which she requires."

"Thou once more let me pray thee, Ida, to remember well all I have told thee. If accident favour my scheme in respect to the birth of these expected little ones, you are well aware how much will depend upon you!"

"Do not fear on that account," returned Ida. "But the sex—"

"Nay—I have provided for that also: the old physician will both serve me in all ways wherein their word alone will be received without a suspicion. Only perform your part well, Ida—I will take care of mine."

"One more question, dear Faust," said the young lady; "and I must return to the château. Have you taken any step in respect to the sentinel who must guard the Chamber of the Cradle?"

"That need not be cared for," answered Faust; "even were the soldier already chosen by ballot, I do not require

to tamper with him! Have I not told you that I possess the power of rendering myself, and any human being who accompanies me, invisible at will? Was it not thus that I rescued Theresa from the Castle of Linsdorf? And shall I not be thereby enabled—"

"I understand you!" interrupted Ida. "Pardon my numerous queries: they are dictated only by a deep anxiety on your account!"

"I know it—I know it, beloved Ida," answered Faust, embracing her. "Now depart, dearest: I shall not see thee again until we meet to-morrow at the archducal palace, whither I must now proceed, in obedience to the promise which I made Theresa this morning."

A week after this interview, all was bustle and expectation in the palace of the Archduke Leopold.

It was five o'clock in the evening; and—singular as the coincidence may seem—the Archduchess and the Countess of Aurana were momentarily expected to become mothers.

Dr. Dorenberg, the archducal physician, was in attendance upon Maria, who occupied the same room in which her husband himself was born, and which, as the reader may remember, communicated with the Hall of Ceremonies.

In another apartment, opening on the spacious landing outside the Hall of Ceremonies, was Theresa, attended by Dr. Lutzen, one of the most eminent physicians of the German capital.

Ida was by the side of her mistress, on whom she lavished every attention with an apparent sincerity which made the Countess rejoice that she had such friend—she no longer called her a "dependent"—near her.

Faust and the Archduke were in the Hall of Ceremonies, where the prothonotary and two or three officials of the Imperial Chancery were also congregated.

In the apartment of the Archduchess was the nurse appointed to the honour of attending on the expectant babe. She was an elderly woman, and Faust had gained her entirely over to his interests, as well as the two physicians.

The Archduke drew Faust into the recess of one of the windows of the spacious saloon, and said, "My dear friend, this is an anxious time for us. But how extraordinary—how *providential*, I might almost say—you start! are you ill? Does suspense prove too much—"

"No, my lord," answered Faust: "a sudden pain, to which I am subject, shot through my head; but it is gone! Your highness was observing—"

"How wonderful is this coincidence," continued the Archduke Leopold. "That the wives of two friends should be about to bless their husbands with pledges of their affection almost at the same moment, strikes me as an omen—as a heavenly indication, I might say, that, should one be a boy, and the other a girl, those children are intended for each other at a future day."

"In that case the dream of your Imperial Highness would be fulfilled," said Faust, with a smile. "But, hark! what mean those shouts outside! They emanate from the barracks opposite the palace."

"They are doubtless the congratulations offered by the soldiery to their two fortunate comrades who have been chosen—"

"Two, my lord!" ejaculated Faust.

"Yes," answered the Archduke. "Have you forgotten the narrative which I one day related to you concerning the abominable plot that an unprincipled physician had conceived in respect to myself, when, as a new-born infant, I was consigned to the Chamber of the Cradle?"

"No, my lord—I have not forgotten it," returned Faust: "I remember it well; and I hope your Highness has adopted those precautions which are necessary to prevent a similar atrocity on the present occasion."

"I have not failed in that respect," said Leopold. "In the first place, I can rely upon that excellent man, Dr. Dorenberg—oh! I can rely upon him as if he were my own father."

"He is assuredly a most respectable and trustworthy personage," observed Faust, a slight smile of contempt curling his lip.

"Then, again, Dame Herder, the nurse is incorruptible," continued the Archduke.

"Evidently so, my lord," returned Faust, whose gold had crossed the dame's palm to no insignificant amount some ten days previously.

"Moreover," said the Archduke, "I have ordered two sentinels to be drawn by lots for the service of the Chamber of the Cradle, at the door of which they will

mount guard together, and thus be spies on each other's actions."

"The best preparation your Highness could devise!" exclaimed Faust.

"No—not the best," observed the Archduke, laughing; "for as an additional safeguard—not that I suspect either the physician or the nurse; but as a duty I owe to myself, to her Imperial Highness, and to the babe of which she will shortly make me the happy father—I shall remain in this saloon from the moment the child is conveyed to the Chamber of the Cradle, until that when the sentinel will present it to the troops from the balcony."

"Your Imperial Highness has resolved most wisely," observed Faust; "and, with your permission, I will keep your lordship company in this vigil."

"Do so, my friend," returned the Archduke.

At this moment, Dame Herder, the imperial nurse, issued from the apartment of the Archduchess, closed the door carefully behind her, and, crossing the Hall of Ceremonies, disappeared by the principal door at the farther end.

On the landing outside, she met Ida, who was hastening in the direction from whence the nurse had come.

"Well met!" said Ida, glancing round to satisfy herself that no stranger was near. "I was coming to you, under pretence of conveying a message of affectionate inquiry from my mistress to yours."

"And I was about to seek you on a similar pretence," observed the nurse. "What news?"

"The Lady Theresa has a lovely boy," returned Ida.

"And the Archduchess a beautiful girl," said the nurse.

"Then Dr. Dorenberg has assured the Archduchess that *hers* is a boy?" whispered Ida, interrogatively.

"Yes. And has Dr. Lutzen acquainted the Lady Theresa that *she* is blessed with a daughter?" asked the nurse.

"He has," replied Ida.

They then separated.

Ida returned to the Lady Theresa; and the nurse retraced her steps to the apartment of the Archduchess.

Their absence and conversation had not altogether lasted five minutes.

But as the nurse traversed the Hall of Ceremonies, she darted a rapid and significant glance towards Faust—unseen by everyone beside, but fully comprehended by him.

A glow of triumph animated his countenance.

Shortly after the return of the nurse to the apartment of the Archduchess, Dr. Dorenberg issued forth, and announced to the Archduke that he was father of a son.

And in a few minutes Dr. Lutzen entered the saloon to acquaint the Count of Aurana that he was father of a daughter.

The medical gentlemen each received a valuable present in acknowledgment of these welcome tidings, and they returned to their patients.

Then the Archduke took Faust's hand, and said—

"My dream will yet be fulfilled! My son shall espouse your daughter!"

"Be it so, my lord," returned the Count.

The prothonotary and the other officials now offered their congratulations to the Archduke on the birth of an heir to his imperial house; and their compliments were acknowledged in a suitable manner.

A messenger was immediately despatched to the barracks; and in a short time he returned, accompanied by two stalwart men-at-arms, who were to guard the door of the Chamber of the Cradle.

We shall pass over the congratulations which the Archduke and Faust offered each other on the events which had just occurred. Leopold's countenance was radiant with unfeigned joy; and he longed for the happy moment when he might embrace his dearly beloved Maria, and thank her for the felicity which she had conferred upon him. On the other hand, Faust felt a bitter pang when he reflected that he was about to consign his child to the possession of others, and receive the offspring of those others as his own! But he concealed his anguish beneath that veil of imperturbable tranquillity which circumstances had so well instructed him how to assume.

An hour had now elapsed since the announcement of the contemporaneous births, when the nurse issued from the apartment of the Archduchess, bearing the infant in her arms.

Dr. Dorenberg accompanied her.

The Archduke hastened to meet Dame Herder, and kissed the infant's forehead with great tenderness.

"This hall strikes cold to the little being," said Dr. Dorenberg, almost immediately.

"In that case, let the nurse proceed at once into the Chamber of the Cradle," exclaimed the Archduke; "and you, good doctor, can give the prothonotary all the information he requires. Not for worlds would I risk the safety of that dear babe."

The nurse passed without farther delay into the Chamber of the Cradle, the door of which was immediately closed behind her; and the sentinels took up their position near it.

"You contrived admirably well to shorten the ceremony of presenting the child to her father," whispered Faust rapidly to the doctor. "He had scarcely time to contemplate it for a moment."

"Nor was it prudent that he should," answered Dorenberg in the same low and rapid tone. "But there are two sentinels."

"Never fear," said Faust. "I will bribe them both."

The doctor gave a slight nod of satisfaction, and turned towards the prothonotary to fulfil the ceremony of registering the birth of the child, whom he represented to be a Prince (instead of a Princess), and on whom the Archduke conferred the name of Maximilian, in honour of his imperial uncle.

We must observe that Faust had not the slightest intention of making the two sentinels his confederates in the damnable treachery which he contemplated; but he had given the above-recorded answer to the physician, simply because he did not dare reveal to him the means which he possessed of eviating the difficulty hinted at by him.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was midnight.

The Archduke and Faust sat at a table covered with a sumptuous banquet, in the Hall of Ceremonies.

The two sentinels stood, motionless as statues, by the door of the Chamber of the Cradle.

The saloon was brilliant with light; and the lustre of the silver lamps was reflected in the ruby wine which crowned the crystal cups upon the table.

"You are happier, Count, than I for the present," said the Archduke; "for you have been able to contemplate your child as long as your heart prompted you; whereas I am deprived of that pleasure until to-morrow. But, tell me—does your amiable Theresa seem supremely happy with her little one cradled on her bosom?"

"I think I informed your Highness," said Faust, "that the moment after my little Adela—for I shall call her Adela—was born, Dr. Lutzen was compelled to administer a soporific to the Countess; so that she has not yet actually seen her babe."

"Ah! I remember—you told me that ere now, Faust," observed the Archduke. "Pardon me, if I be abstracted—if I forget anything which regards you or your amiable Countess, I do not feel the less interest in you; but the idea of my own happiness in being a father makes me selfish, and occupies all my thoughts. Is it so with you?"

"Nearly so, my lord," returned Faust.

"I will leave you for a few moments," said Leopold, after a brief pause; "but do not laugh at my anxiety to assure myself that the Archduchess is indeed beyond all danger. You will not leave this room," added the Prince, significantly, as he glanced towards the door of the Chamber of the Cradle.

"Assuredly not, my lord," answered Faust.

"For I know," observed the Archduke, in a whisper, "that your friendship for me prompts you to regard with almost as much interest as I experience the sanctity of that chamber."

"Do not say almost, my lord," returned Faust; "I can completely identify myself with your Highness in that respect."

The Archduke acknowledged this friendly assurance with a grateful smile, and then passed into the apartment of his idolized Maria.

Faust drew a small phial from beneath his doublet, and removed the cork;—then, under pretence of reaching a fruit-dish, he emptied the contents of the bottle into the Archduke's crystal cup.

This was done so skilfully and so rapidly that the sentries—even had they been attentively watching the Count of Aurland's movements—could not have perceived his manoeuvre.

Nor did the countenance of Faust manifest any emotion; but his heart leapt within him—and a voice of triumph sang in his soul.

"I shall outwit the Demon yet!" he thought within himself.

In a short time the Archduke returned, his countenance radiant with joy.

"How fares her Imperial Highness?" asked Faust.

"So prosperously that we have conversed together without drawing a rebuke from good Dr. Dorenberg," was the reply.

"With your Highness's permission, we will pledge good Dr. Dorenberg," exclaimed Faust.

"And with him we will couple your Dr. Lutzen," added the Archduke, as he filled his cup with the rich red wine of Burgundy.

Faust followed his example: and the two cups were immediately drained.

Then followed a conversation on the topics nearest and dearest to the heart of the Archduke, and which, as his Highness imagined, were equally near and dear to that of the Count.

But in a short time Leopold experienced a drowsiness which he could not shake off. He rose and paced the room; but this was of no avail. He re-seated himself, drank another cup of wine, ate some fruit, and at length sank into a profound slumber.

Faust allowed some little time to elapse ere he moved from his seat.

At length he arose, and, addressing the sentinels, said, "My good friends, your task of watching is an onerous one. A cup of wine and a morsel of food will not render ye less fit for your duties. You have my permission to seat yourselves at the table, and partake of the dainties spread thereon;—and, in giving ye this license, I do but obey the commands which his Imperial Highness ere now imparted to me. In a few minutes I shall return."

The sentinels were by no means unwilling to avail themselves of this invitation; and they accordingly took their seats at the board.

Faust then left the Hall of Ceremonies.

In a few minutes he returned, bearing his child—his son—in his arms.

But the sentinels neither perceived nor heard him.

He hastened to the Chamber of the Cradle; and thence he issued again almost immediately, now carrying the daughter of the Archduke.

Nor on this occasion did the sentinels either perceive or hear him!

He crossed the saloon, quitted it, and remained absent several minutes.

Then he returned; and this time the sentinels both saw and heard him!

They quaffed each another cup, by his desire, and resumed their watch at the door of the Chamber of the Cradle—little suspecting the perfidy which had just been consummated.

Faust remained in the Hall during the night; and the Archduke slept until the morning.

The ceremony of presenting the young Prince Maximilian to the soldiery then took place; and the child was conveyed to the Archduchess, who fondly believed herself to be its mother.

In the meantime Theresa had awoke from the deep sleep into which her physician had purposely thrown her; and to her bosom she pressed the infant girl to whom, she was led to imagine, she had given birth.

Thus, Faust's son remained with the Archduchess; and that Princess's daughter was dearly cherished by Theresa!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### VESUVIUS.

ONE year has elapsed since the events narrated in the preceding chapter.

It was now the spring of 1495.

But our scene changes.

Seated in the bosom of a vast bay, Naples extends her grandeur along the coast from Portici to Miseno. The shelving shores, the adjacent heights, and the mountains, still further in the background, are covered with palaces and charming villas.

Two hundred and forty thousand individuals live in wealth or competency in that city; and sixty thousand miserable wretches have not where to lay their heads.

But the gardens and the groves which adorn the heights behind the capital of the Two Sicilies are incomparably lovely and inviting. The grounds, too, are there ever clothed with verdure, for cold winter's sceptre is powerless in that domain.



With the earliest dawn, a refreshing gale sweeps from the Mediterranean, wafting vigour and coolness into the stifling streets; and when the sun sinks to rest, a breeze comes, laden with perfume, from the hills, to fill the dwellings with fragrance, and lull their inmates to rest.

But it is in the still and silent morning that Naples is seen with its best aspect. Then it is that, amid the temporary lull—so soon to be broken by the uplifting of myriads of voices—the Queen of the Mediterranean appears to smile royally upon the sea that spreads before her, with its bay, its promontories, and its island—while above stretches an unclouded canopy of azure, whose pure tints assume a mellow, then gradually a golden glow, as it approaches the horizon in the east.

And that horizon is broken by mountains and rocks, rising in every fantastic shape; and in the centre of that uneven background, towers, in frowning majesty to the sky, the scorched cone of Vesuvius.

The mountains of Somma and Ottajano, by which it is bounded, and which have one common base, seem pigmies by the side of that colossus of nearly four thousand feet.

The lower part of Vesuvius is covered on all sides with large towns, delightful villas, and beautiful hamlets. There fertility, natural loveliness, and artificial embellishment, combine to create a species of terrestrial paradise.

But farther up the mountain, the scene is one of devastation, the utter barrenness of the soil being marked with black lines, which show the furrows that have been ploughed by rivers of lava.

Naples was not serene in its quietly beauty, nor its sky unclouded, nor its sea tranquil, on the 1st of May, 1495.

For on the preceding evening the shock of an earthquake had been felt; and an hour before sunrise on the ensuing morning, millions of red-hot stones were suddenly shot into the air from the bowels of Vesuvius.

Then ensued one of the most terrific eruptions recorded in the history of the mountain.

First the crater vomited forth flames, which rose to a height of three thousand feet, and which were crowned by a canopy of dense and sombre smoke.

The glare of those terrific flames rendered the light painful to contemplate, and the heat dreadful to endure, for miles and miles around.

In a short time mighty fissures were opened in the uppermost part of the crater; and then the streams of lava poured forth—slowly at first, but speedily gathering violence and force, until the torrents rushed down with overwhelming fury.

Then, adieu to the villas, the hamlets, and the casinos on the acclivity of the mountain's base; adieu to the groves, the citron and orange trees, the fruit-laden vines, and the parterres of flowers.

The palace of the peer and the cot of the rustic were involved in one common ruin. As the lava approached each dwelling, the glass melted from the window-frames; then, when the torrent swept over the habitations, the roofs fell in with a terrific crash.

And hither and thither rushed the affrighted people—women sending forth piteous shrieks, as they clasped their babes to their bosoms, men wearing on their faces an expression of blank despair, as they dragged their little ones hurriedly along, for the lava pursued them like a black and open-mouthed monster, ready to devour them.

The sun rose, red and ominous; but his light was not needed to exhibit the full horrors of the scene. And now the mountain vomited forth columns of water, scalding hot; and which, after rising like a transparent pillar to the sky, branched off at the top into myriads of jets, which fell in boiling showers around the base of Vesuvius.

For an hour did this deluge continue, and then the crater sent up clouds of hot dust and ashes; while the atmosphere rapidly grew dark and murky. The sun was veiled in a deep gloom; a black, oppressive, and fetid vapour settled upon the land for miles around the volcanic mount, and shocks of an earthquake were again felt.

Then the sea began to rock and roar, as if its very bed were broken up, and it dashed on the coasts with a deafening din.

The darkness increased to such a degree that, like the plague of Egypt, it was felt. Still, in the distance, red, lurid flames played on the summit of the crater, like the forked tongues of enormous serpents, whose folds were agitating within the mount itself.

Ever and anon the volcano threw up masses of rock and immense stones, which rebounded from the side of the mountain where they fell, or else, breaking into a thou-

sand fragments, were carried far and wide, to add to the general devastation.

While the affrighted inhabitants of the towns, hamlets, villas, casinos, and cots, upon the lower part of the mountain were flying from the scene of horror—flying in wild confusion, some with prayers, and some with curses on their lips—flying from the danger behind, as if pursued by myriads of ravenous wolves—while parents were compelled to relinquish the hands of their laggard little ones, and thus abandon their offspring to the lava that wound its way like a black serpent at their heels—while nature seemed convulsed, earth trembling, sea roaring, and heaven darting forth forked lightnings through the dense clouds—two beings were wending their way up the mountain.

Threading their path between the streams of lava, they appeared unmindful of the boiling water and red-hot ashes which showered around them.

While others were flying from the scene of peril and of horror, those two beings were climbing up the height, towards the crater of the volcano.

Terrible journey!

Now the wind swept furiously over them—now streams of lava meandered near them—then pestiferous vapours and fetid heats assailed them—now lightnings darted through the dense cloud, and played upon their countenances—now storms of stones, and cinders, and fragments of rock, ploughed up the earth around them—then the breath of the volcano, like the exhalations from the venomous jaws of a huge serpent, enveloped them in its sickening atmosphere—then flames, red and lurid, darted by their side, licking their very garments—but still they pursued their way—unhurt—uninjured—untouched!

The terrific shrieks of women, the screams of lost or abandoned children, and the agonizing cries of strong and vigorous men, who struggled impotently in the lava which had overtaken them, met the ears of those two strange beings, but did not divert them from their purpose.

The roar of the sea, as it raged and rocked in its mighty bed—the din of the enormous masses of rock which thundered down the sides of the mountain—the terrific howl of rushing winds—the crash of habitations—the fall of stately trees—the hollow rumbling which came from the bowels of the volcano—and the sweeping sound of the storm of cinders—these also met the ears of the two adventurous travellers, but did not drive them back.

And now the mountain gradually assumed an appearance so terrific, so appalling, amidst the utter darkness which prevailed, that had not those two men possessed some superhuman power, they would have shrunk in dismay from the fearful spectacle.

The crater grew rapidly red with heat, and the lurid glow descended farther and farther, spreading deeper and deeper all round, until, in a short half-hour, the entire mountain seemed one tremendous pile of red-hot cinders.

And it was now up the burning eminence that the two travellers pursued their way, unhurt, uninjured.

But though the mountain glowed as if the fires within shone through porous and transparent sides—though the volcano shone like a pyramidal furnace of diaphanous construction—the cloud of darkness still hung around it, closing it in, borrowing no illumination from it, losing not one shade of its density in its immediate contact with that colossal pile of glowing matter.

Strange and terrible phenomenon!

Suddenly there was an awful and a crushing din—louder than the roar of the tossing billows in the bay—louder than the rebounding of the huge stones flung from the bowels of the volcano—louder than all the complicated sounds which characterised that day of horror.

Then two wondrous things occurred.

First, the summit of the truncated cone of Vesuvius was split in two, and an awful chasm was opened between the mighty glowing masses thus riven asunder.

Next, the waves of the Lucrine Lake, in the neighbourhood of the volcano, tossed and heaved, as if agitated by an earthquake at their depths; and slowly there arose from the midst of the turbid waters a new hill, which, displacing the foaming, raging element, grew rapidly, and in a few hours, to the height of four hundred and fifty feet!

It settled thus on the site of the Lucrine, with a base of a mile and a half in circumference, and reducing the lake itself to a shallow pool.

It is now known as Monte Nuovo, or the "New Mountain."

But while nature thus waged its elemental war, and performed its prodigies, the two travellers pursued their

way up the sides of the glowing volcano—unhurt—uninjured!

While houses, groves, hamlets, and green woods disappeared as if they stood on trap-doors that suddenly gave way, and plunged them into profound abysses beneath—while thousands of men, women, and children were flying far, far away from the acclivities of the mountain, those two travellers threaded the mazes between the streams of lava, up the glowing pyramid, scatheless and secure as the Israelites in the passage of the Red Sea.

"Say, fiend," cried Faust, as he followed the calm and measured step of the Demon, "is all this indeed your handiwork?"

"'Tis mine, if thou wilt," answered the deep, sonorous voice of the Demon; "but 'tis also thine!"

"Mine!" repeated Faust, as if recoiling with horror from the thought. "Nay, impute not to me the desolating powers which thou dost wield!"

"Short-sighted mortal!" ejaculated the Demon, with a fearful and unearthly laugh—a mocking, bitter, sardonic laugh, which made the blood of Faust run cold in his veins; "perhaps thou wilt say next that when we stood on the summit of the Brocken, and my voice evoked from the caverns of the north that tempest which desolated the entire territory in the neighbourhood of the Elbe—perhaps thou wilt say that thou wast innocent of all the evil which I then worked."

"No," replied Faust, in a melancholy tone, "I have often pondered since on the useless wickedness—the ineffectual iniquity of that mad whim of mine!"

"'Tis well that you confess when you are wrong," said the Demon, changing his lofty tone of mocking defiance to one of chuckling railery. "How seldom is it that poor weak mortal chooses to avow his error! how earnestly he clings to his own assertions, even when he knows that he is wrong. There is a little demon," he continued, in a tone of jeering sarcasm, which it was horrible to hear, "that lurks in every mortal's breast, and that undermines his happiness more surely—more secretly—more rapidly than even his great and prominent vices."

"And what is that?" asked Faust.

"PRIDE!" answered the Demon. "That sentiment controls all the actions of you miserable mortals. I have seen a trivial dispute between a husband and wife, who dote upon each other, become a grave and serious quarrel—ay, one which has led to separation, and turned their love to hatred, simply because Pride—that wretched, frivolous feeling—prevented the one who was wrong from acknowledging the error, and making the first advance towards a reconciliation. I have seen a man, in a moment of anger, say a harsh word to his best friend, and then lose that friend for ever, because he could not so bend his Pride as to allow him to murmur the simple words, 'I was wrong!' I have seen," continued the Demon, and he raised his voice almost exultingly as he spoke, "I have seen the son abandon his father—the daughter alienated from her mother—the sister resign the love of a brother, only because they could not humble themselves to say, 'Forgive me; I was wrong!' Ay—and I have seen kings lose their most faithful minister—maidens their adoring lovers—lovers their worshipping fair ones—and all because that little contemptible demon called PRIDE would not permit their lips to frame a confession of hastiness or error. You see I call PRIDE a demon; but it is one whom I—even I—most cordially despise."

"But why this long tirade?" demanded Faust, who shrank from the bitter, biting words of the Demon.

"Our conversation led me to trouble you with those remarks," answered the Demon; "and yet it does not become me to teach you moralities," he added, with another sardonic laugh. "We will, however, return to our original topic. You asked me if I indeed worked all this desolation. I answer Yes—and for you, too!"

"For me!" cried Faust, again startled by the observation.

"For you," returned the Demon. "Oh! I can assure you, I am a thoughtful and obedient slave!"

"A slave!" muttered Faust, with bitter irony; "a master!"

"I shall be a master—twenty-two years hence, if we add a month or so to the present reckoning," returned the Demon. "But I will not leave you in suspense concerning the remark I ere now made, and which startled you so strangely. When last evening we were conversing in Vienna, you asked me to tell you somewhat of that region which calls me sovereign. I offered—with becoming courtesy—and here he chuckled horribly—"to introduce you to my Kingdom. You accepted the invita-

tion. But such horrors will you see there, Faust," he continued, seriously, "that I dared not show you the secrets of your future dwelling-place, until I had plunged you amidst the utmost terrors which earth's elemental warfare can afford; and they are poor, poor indeed, in comparison with those dread scenes which you will presently contemplate below! Yes—I deemed it well to let you feel this oppressive darkness—to behold yon glowing mountain—to mark the effects of that scalding lava—to view the ravages of this whirlwind of ashes—to judge of the force of that internal fire, which can split asunder the summit of Vesuvius, and cast up a mountain from the depths of the Lucrine Lake! I suffer you to see and feel all this—and yet to remain unhurt. Such a foretaste will prepare you—oh! prepare you well to behold the terrors of my Kingdom. And yet, as I ere now said, these are feeble emblems of the features of my domains. Here are no hideous serpents, which coil themselves around the palpitating form, and lick the countenance with their forked tongues of flame. Here are no monsters—ten thousand times more frightful than the alligators of the Nile—which play with their victims, and then prey upon them—and yet those victims never dying! Here are no eternal torments, which you must see to understand! For if the lava overtake some few of yon fugitive mortals, it consumes them in a short space; and their agony is only of a few minutes! But in my Kingdom, the agony is eternal—the lava unceasing—the flames unquenchable!"

"Enough—enough!" cried Faust. "Oh! this is too horrible!"

"Do you repent your wish to behold my domains?" asked the Demon. If so, you are the master, and can command—for the present!"

"No," returned Faust. "A desperate sentiment of curiosity inspires me. I will not retreat. But, remember—this evening I must again be in Vienna."

"Order—and I obey. You know that my will is a rapid wing, that can annihilate the distance between Naples and the imperial city of Germany."

They had now reached that point on the mountain's side down to which the upper part of the crater had been riven.

From thence branched off the paths that, amidst streams of lava, led to the summits of the two heads of the volcano.

"Do you proceed in that direction," said the Demon, "while I take this."

"But why should we separate?" asked Faust.

"Because two cannot stand together on the topmost pinnacle of either of those heights into which the mountain has been split," replied the Demon.

Then they separated, and pursued their way, one up the southern division, the other up the northern head of Vesuvius.

In a short time they each gained the summit.

But though now an immense interval divided them, Faust could behold the Demon's form, and hear his voice as plainly as if they were but a few yards asunder.

For the darkness had rolled away, the sun once more shone brightly, and the eruption from the depths of the volcano had ceased.

It was mid-day.

Faust glanced upwards to the blue sky, in the centre of which hung the glorious lamp of heaven; then he cast his looks downwards, and beheld a terrible abyss, whose profundities no mortal eyes could fathom, yawning at his feet.

The mountain was no longer candescent; the raging of the sea in the bay, at a distance of three leagues, had subsided; the tempest had ceased; and the streams of lava were rapidly becoming cold.

But the devastation around the base of the volcano still remained.

The bells of Naples were ringing joyfully to summon the inhabitants to prayer, that they might return thanks to Heaven for the safety of their queenly city, whose dwellings the lava had not reached.

For the towns, hamlets, and villas on the lower part of the volcano had alone been destroyed in this memorable convulsion.

And that devastation was enough!

Faust shuddered as his glances plunged into those hideous depths whence the stream of burning matter had flowed.

"Behold one of the avenues to my Kingdom!" suddenly rang the sonorous voice of the Demon in the ears of Faust. "Hast thou the courage to venture there?"

"I have," answered Faust.

"Then let us delay no longer!" exclaimed the fiend.

And almost at the same moment the mountain seemed to rock upon its base: the clefts in the crater closed with a hideous din, again becoming an unbroken but rugged circle, inclosing an abyss as black as night.

Suddenly the Demon stood by the side of Faust, whose hand he took.

"Are you prepared?" he demanded, fixing his penetrating eyes upon the young Count.

"I am," answered the latter.

"Then, come!"

And they plunged together headlong into the crater of Vesuvius.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE BARON OF CZERNIN.

On the same day when the terrific eruption of Vesuvius devastated the immediate vicinity of the mountain, and menaced the safety of Naples, certain events not the less worthy of being recorded in these chapters occurred in the imperial city of Vienna.

In one of the principal streets stood a splendid dwelling, inhabited by the Baron and Baroness of Czernin.

The Baron was a man of about forty years of age. He had once been handsome; but dissipation and intemperance had made sad ravages on his constitution, the effects of which were too well depicted on his pale countenance and in his hollow eyes. He concealed a naturally vulgar mind and coarse manners beneath an affectation of bluntness and honesty of speech, which, he declared, were natural to him; and as he was a convivial companion, had travelled much, and gambled deeply, when he had the means, he was more or less a favourite among the dissipated portion of the nobility of Vienna. Moreover, the refinements of civilization had not, in those times, reached a degree which pointed the contrast between politeness and vulgarity so nicely as in the subsequent age.

The Baron's history contained certain peculiarities, which it is necessary to mention.

His parents died when he was very young, and left him to the care of his uncle, a wealthy official in one of the government departments. The orphan was not, however, dependent upon this relative. His father had bequeathed to him an immense fortune, the stewardship of which was invested in the hands of the uncle until the young Baron should attain the age of twenty-three. The uncle was an upright, honest, and laborious man, who not only took the best possible care of the young Theodore, but also exerted his utmost to improve the estate to which he was the heir. Thus when Theodore reached the age at which he was entitled to assume the direction of his own affairs, he found himself one of the richest nobles in the German empire. Shortly after he attained his majority his uncle died, leaving him a munificent addition to his already princely fortune.

Theodore now set out on his travels—for he had ever entertained, from his youth upwards, a violent inclination to visit foreign countries, especially the Ottoman empire. In those times there were few facilities for obtaining the remittance of money from place to place by means of bills of exchange or the agency of bankers: all financial matters were in the hands of Jews: and with the members of this misunderstood and unjustly persecuted race the more fastidious kinds of Christians would have as little to do as possible. Of this nature was Theodore von Czernin; and as he did not choose to entrust his affairs into the hands of the Israelite agents, he provided himself with jewels and other valuables, which were easily convertible into money, and of which he furnished himself with an amount requisite for the expenses of an absence of three or four years.

Thus provided, he set out. Twelve years passed away; and no tidings of him reached his friends in Vienna. At the expiration of that period, the officials of the Imperial Chancery made certain representations to the Emperor, to the effect that the Baron of Czernin had been absent for the above-mentioned time; that he had not written to any of his acquaintances or friends; that there was every reason to believe he had met with an untimely end in some foreign country; that his tenants were enjoying the use of his lands without paying any rents for the same; and that, as he had no heirs, a decree of forfeiture to the crown, in respect to the Czernin estates, had better issue, with the usual proviso that they should be restored to the rightful owner, if he ever came forward to claim them with sufficient proofs of his identity.

This representation was duly considered by the Emperor; and in a short time the decree was issued. But scarcely had it been promulgated, when the Baron of Czernin re-appeared at Vienna. He was sadly altered in appearance; and those who had remembered the elegant, courteous, and fascinating young nobleman, who had set out on his travels upwards of twelve years previously, could hardly recognise the same individual in the coarse, blunt, and dissipated person who now returned amongst them.

He preferred his claims at the Imperial Chancery for the restoration of his estates. The authorities subjected him to a searching examination. But he presented the most unquestionable proofs of his identity. He related all his early history with readiness and accuracy; he detailed the particulars of his property and the names of his tenants; he even displayed some of the jewels which he had taken with him, and which his former friends immediately recognised. Then he gave a long, but clear and connected narrative of his travels in European and Asiatic Turkey, and showed how a long and rigorous imprisonment at Erzeroum, for a political offence of which he was not really guilty, had occasioned his prolonged absence, and his silence in respect to epistolary communication with any of his friends in Vienna. Then the servants whom he had left behind at his house in the German capital, and many persons who had known him well ere he set out on his travels, came forward and proved that, although considerably altered, his personal appearance was indeed that of Theodore von Czernin.

The Imperial Chancery admitted his claims and restored his property. This event occurred about four years previous to the time when we now introduce him to the reader.

The moment he obtained possession of his estates, he plunged into a career of dissipation and extravagance which alienated all the friends of his youthful days. He moreover discharged those faithful dependents whom he had left behind him when he set out on his travels, and whom he found at his mansion on his return after so weary an absence. He filled their places with persons of indifferent character, and whom he admitted as the companions of his orgies. His usual associates were, however, the most dissolute of the nobility of Vienna,—men of broken fortunes and suspected fame, and whose only recommendation to the Baron was their readiness to keep his company in his obscene pursuits and drunken revelries. They treated him as their parallels, in these times, always treat the poor fool who encourages such hangers-on; they plundered him in the most open and bare-faced manner; and when his immense wealth was exhausted in the miserably short career of three years after his return from his foreign travel, they deserted him, one and all.

Then did he open his eyes to the folly of his past conduct; and he cursed his own extravagance while he anathematized the ingratitude of those whom he had deemed his friends.

It was about this time that Faust introduced himself to the Baron of Czernin. Theresa had a few weeks before become a mother; and Ida had performed her part in the atrocious drama of changing the children.

Faust therefore no longer required Ida to be in attendance upon his wife; and he now set to work to provide a husband—a complaisant husband, for his mistress. With this object had he sought the acquaintance of the Baron of Czernin; and a bargain was speedily concluded between them. The Baron received an enormous bribe from the hands of Faust; and, about a month after Theresa had become a mother, Ida bestowed her hand on the Baron of Czernin. Immediately after the ceremony, the newly-married couple repaired to a distant town, where they remained several months, passing under a feigned name. There Ida became the mother of a child—the fruit of her intimacy with Faust—which did not survive its birth above four-and-twenty hours. As soon as she was sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigue of travelling, she accompanied her husband back to Vienna, the secret of her past shame being thus successfully veiled from the eyes of the world.

Since this precaution was adopted, it may be asked by the reader wherefore Faust had troubled himself at all to find a husband for his guilty mistress. Ida was necessary to Faust; she knew the secret of his fate—she was acquainted with the particulars relating to the Chamber of the Cradle. She loved Faust with all the ardour which belonged to her warm temperament—for, as her family name indicated, she was of Italian origin. Moreover, Faust entertained a strange and mysterious pas-

sion for her,—a passion whose principal ingredient was sensuality,—and which does not essentially interfere with the mellowed and less enthusiastic, but still sincere, feeling which he now experienced towards Theresa. Thus Faust was anxious, from necessity and inclination, to maintain his intimacy with Ida; and this he could only do, without danger as to the results, by providing her with a husband who should be so in name only. On his part, the Baron cared little how his wife conducted herself, so long as he possessed the means of gratifying his own dissipated habits and licentious pursuits.

Thus stood matters in respect to the Baron and Baroness of Czernin at the time when we propose to introduce the reader to their habitation; and it must be remembered that this retrospection over a period of nearly a year, brings us to the 1st of May, 1495.

We said, then, that on the same day when the eruption of Vesuvius occurred in the vicinity of Naples, certain events took place in the Baron's mansion at Vienna.

Ida was sitting in her own chamber, contemplating a casket of jewels which Faust had presented to her a few days previously, when her principal female attendant, Gertrude, entered the room with something bordering on trepidation.

"Oh, my lady!" she exclaimed, "there is such a strange man in the marble hall, who insists upon seeing you."

"Seeing me!" repeated Ida, her thoughts immediately settling—and not without alarm—upon her brother Otto. "What kind of a person is he?"

"Short, thin, and with a great red beard, my lady, that seems as if it had never been acquainted with a comb," answered Gertrude.

"He cannot wish to see me—I know no such monster," said Ida, whose mind was relieved by this description, from the idea that the visitor might be her brother. "There must be some mistake."

"There really is no mistake, my lady," continued Gertrude. "He presented himself at the gate, and demanded speech of my lord. The porter assured him that my lord was not within. Then the uncouth fellow pushes by the porter, enters the hall, takes a seat, and declares that he will wait till my lord comes in. In a few minutes he calls the porter, and desires to be conducted into a room where some food and wine may be served up to him. The porter refuses; the stranger storms; and at that moment I was passing through the hall. The porter tells me all that had occurred—"

"Gertrude, you are tedious," interrupted Ida, impatiently. "What has this drunken intruder to do with me? Let some of our lacqueys thrust him from the door."

"That is more easily said than done, my lady," returned Gertrude. "The man brandishes a huge stick in his hand; and beneath his doublet I caught a glimpse of pistols."

"But did he inquire for me?" asked the Baroness of Czernin.

"Yes, my lady. While I was remonstrating with him on the impropriety of his conduct, in thrusting himself so unceremoniously into a mansion, where he could have no possible business, I happened to observe that my lady would be very angry with him, when he flies up in a moment, and says, 'Oh! your lord is married, is he?'—and then he insists upon seeing your ladyship."

"You have a very excellent mode of making a short story as long as you can, Gertrude," said Ida. "But I will see this rude wight, and ascertain his business."

To this step the Baroness was impelled by her curiosity to discover whether it was any one of her husband's boon companions who dared to make so free in that abode.

She proceeded to the hall, attended by Gertrude; and, on reaching that place, was immediately confronted by an individual of about forty-five, whose attire was of a coarse description, and whose personal appearance corresponded with the portrait already drawn by Gertrude.

"I suppose you're my Lady Baroness, are you?" he exclaimed, carrying his hand hastily to his rusty travelling cap.

"I am the Baroness of Czernin, sir," answered Ida; "and I am waiting to know who you may be."

"Who I may be!" repeated the intruder, with a coarse laugh; "that's as the case turns out—friend or foe, according to circumstances—but more inclined to be the former. All that, however, must be talked over in private between me and the Baron. Oh! I can assure you, he will not frown on me as your ladyship is doing. He and I are old friends, although we have not seen each other for some years. When will he return, my lady?"

"In time, I hope, to thrust an insolent and familiar serf like you from the door," answered Ida, with ineffable contempt.

"I really do not think that he will do that, my lady," returned the man, in a tone of confidence which somewhat amazed the Baroness. "However, as I do not wish to have any harsh words with so sweet a creature as yourself—"

"Impertinent menial!" ejaculated Ida, the blood rushing to her countenance. Begone!"

"That is just what I am going to do, my lady," observed the stranger, coolly. "But I shall return in the evening, shortly after sunset; and you may tell his lordship that his friend Schurmann will pay him a visit. He will be quite charmed to see me."

The man made another attempt at a salute, and turned upon his heel to leave the hall.

"I do not think your reception will be quite so pleasant as you seem to fancy," grumbled the porter, as he opened the gate to afford the man egress.

"Oh! you entertain that opinion, do you?" said Schurmann, in a cool, independent fashion; and at the same time he let the knobbed end of his staff fall pretty heavily on the porter's hand as it grasped the key of the door.

The porter uttered a volley of abuse against the insolent stranger; but the latter sauntered leisurely away, chanting a bacchanalian song.

Ida anxiously watched for the return of her husband; for she felt uneasy at the insolent confidence with which Schurmann had spoken of the reception he anticipated at the hands of the Baron.

That nobleman did not, however, make his appearance until a full hour after sunset; and then he returned with his countenance flushed with wine.

"Her ladyship wishes to speak a few words with you, my lord," said the porter.

"Her ladyship is very condescending," observed the Baron, who was in a particularly unpleasant temper, he having just lost an enormous sum at a gaming-table—for with the possession of fresh resources, his old habits were rapidly returning.

At that moment, Ida, attended by Gertrude, made her appearance from a room adjoining the great marble hall.

"It is well that we meet here," my lord," said she, accosting him; "because, as I have been insulted in the presence of the porter, and of my own female dependant, your lordship can, in their hearing, give me an assurance that the insolent intruder, to whom I allude, will experience a befitting reception at your hands, should he dare to make his appearance within these walls again."

"Your ladyship has been insulted?" hiccupped the Baron, who did not seem rightly to comprehend the meaning of his wife's words.

"Yes—grossly insulted, by a vulgar serf, who dares to claim acquaintance with your lordship, and who has threatened to return this evening," continued Ida, anxiously watching her husband's countenance.

"And who may this intruder be?" demanded the Baron. "Did he give no name?"

"He said that you would know him as your friend Schurmann, my lord!" answered Ida.

"Schurmann!" ejaculated the Baron, his face turning deadly pale, and the fumes of wine fleeing away from his brain in a moment.

"Yes—Schurmann," repeated Ida. "Do you know him?"

"Unfortunately, I do—too well!" cried the Baron; then, in another moment, he seemed to recover himself, and affecting to smile, said, "Your ladyship need not be alarmed—he will do us no harm. But I must see him—see him privately, too, the instant he arrives. I will await his coming in this apartment."

With these words, he hurried into one of the rooms which opened from the hall, and closed the door violently behind him.

The mention of Schurmann's name had evidently produced a strange and mysterious effect upon the Baron of Czernin.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE WALPURGIS NIGHT.

Ida remained standing in the hall—transfixed as it were to the spot, with astonishment at the conduct of her husband.

The agitation of his manner, when the name of Schurmann met his ears, was so remarkable, that Ida felt convinced that some alarming mystery was connected with the knowledge which that vulgarian had of her husband.

Was theirs the intimacy of crime? were pecuniary affairs connected with the visit of Schurmann and the agitation of the Baron? or had the boozing companionship of drunken orgies become a link of friendship between them?

Such were the questions which Ida rapidly revolved in her mind, immediately after the Baron had precipitated himself into the adjacent room, in the manner related in the preceding chapter.

But Ida's reverie was very shortly interrupted; for the bell suddenly rang with unusual violence; and Schurmann swaggered into the hall.

"Well, fair lady," he cried, "is the noble Baron come home yet? If so, I pray thee to conduct me to his most gracious presence; for I long to pledge him in a friendly cup, I care not whether of sparkling Rhenish or of foaming beer."

"His lordship, whom you call your friend, sir," returned Ida, with superb hauteur, "is desirous that you should be admitted to his presence."

"The devil!" ejaculated Schurmann, leering impudently at Ida. "What! he plays the lord, then? His presence, forsooth! A precious drunken one at times, I guess—ch, my lady?"

"Insolent varlet!" cried the Baroness, her whole countenance becoming suddenly crimson, and her dark eyes flashing fire; "this to me in my own house!"

Then throwing open the door of the apartment to which the Baron had retired, she exclaimed, "My lord, do you permit a vulgar, unmannerly hind like this to insult your wife by his familiar talk, and to speak in the most disrespectful manner of yourself?"

"He means no harm, Ida—it is his way," cried the Baron, hastening forward to receive his visitor. "Schurmann—my dear friend—you are welcome!"

"I knew that I should be," said that individual, with a glance of triumph towards Ida. "What is the use of this fine lady calling me names and giving herself such airs? It would have served her right if I had used my lips as a seal to close her pretty mouth."

"Hush, hush, Schurmann—for God's sake!" whispered the Baron, in a tone of appeal rather than of command.

"When your lordship has a few moments to devote to me," said Ida, whose ears had not failed to catch her husband's words, although they were only intended for Schurmann, "I shall be glad to receive an explanation of such unparalleled conduct on the part of this base-born ruffian."

Having thus spoken, Ida walked majestically out of the room; but ere the door closed behind her, she heard Schurmann say, in a voice that was almost choked with rage, "Egad! Baron What's-your-name, we must punish her for this insolence!"

Ida repaired to her chamber, and directed Gertrude to bring her word when Schurmann took his leave.

An hour elapsed; and the servant returned to her mistress.

"Has he departed?" asked Ida, hastily.

"No, my lady," was the reply; "but his lordship craves an interview with you."

"Inform his lordship that I will receive him here," said Ida.

Gertrude retired; and in a few minutes the Baron made his appearance.

"I presume you are as anxious to give as I am to receive an explanation of the proceedings of this day," began Ida. "An unmannerly knave insults us both to our faces—in our own abode; and your lordship treats him with courtesy—nay, even with cringing attention, as if he were the superior, and you the menial."

"I have no explanation to give you," cried the Baron, impatiently. "All I can say to satisfy you is, that if you will grant the request I am about to make, you will never be annoyed again with Schurmann's presence."

"And what may this request be?" demanded Ida, haughtily.

"Money—and a considerable sum too," returned the Baron. "For my part, I have not a stiver left."

"Is the fellow Schurmann still in this house, my lord?"

"He is. He wants some money—and I have none to give him. You can command the purse of the Count of Auran, and must aid me on this occasion."

"Am I to understand, my lord," said Ida, fixing her dark eyes keenly upon him, "that some terrible mystery places you in the power of this man who insults your wife to your face?"

"My wife, indeed!" ejaculated the Baron, contemptuously. "Is it my place to protect you? Are you my

wife in the eyes of Heaven, although you may be in those of men?"

"Our hands were united at the altar, my lord," returned Ida; "and there you vowed to defend me."

"Yes—our hands were united, truly;—but not our hearts," continued the Baron. "Neither have I ever claimed the privileges of a husband. But I need scarcely remind you of the terms on which we were tied to each other. One thing is certain—I do not seek to be admitted to your confidence; and you have no right to penetrate into my secrets."

"Be it so," said Ida. "I may, however, refuse to supply you with money for purposes the nature of which I cannot comprehend."

"Take care what you are doing, Ida," exclaimed the Baron: "you may repent this obstinacy on your part. Schurmann has a certain claim upon me; and I cannot—I dare not refuse to liquidate it. Supply me with the means to do this, and I can assure you that his presence here shall never again disturb you. Refuse me, and I have no alternative left but—"

"But what, my lord?" asked the Baroness.

"I have no alternative, I repeat," continued Von Czernin, "save to apply to the Count on my own behalf."

"And if he should refuse you?"

"I must raise the amount I require from some Jew, who will receive all the movable articles of value in this house by way of security."

"Then your case is very desperate, my lord," exclaimed Ida; "and you must have committed some dreadful crime, which has placed you in this wretch Schurmann's power."

"Crime!" said the Baron, contemptuously. "Does Ida—late minion to the Countess of Auran, and now Baroness of Czernin—dare to reproach me with a crime—even if I had actually committed one? Does your ladyship, who—when a lovely babe lay pillowed on your bosom—the child of Faust, your paramour—"

"Hold! hold!" cried Ida, a deadly pallor overspreading her countenance. "We are wrong to reproach each other, my lord. There is the key of yonder bureau: in the secret drawer you will find gold. Take the amount you require—and arrange with that man in such a fashion that he may trouble us no more."

The Baron took the key, and opened the bureau, whence he helped himself to the sum he needed.

He then left the room.

In a quarter of an hour afterwards, Gertrude conveyed to Ida the welcome intelligence that Schurmann had taken his departure.

Ida regarded the water-clepsydra, or time-glass, which stood in her apartment, and, murmuring to herself, "The hour draws near!" made a sign for Gertrude to retire. Then, having filled her purse with gold, and enveloping herself in an ample cloak, with a hood which concealed her countenance, she issued from the house by a private door at the back of the premises.

She wended her way through several dark, dirty, and lonely streets—every now and then pausing and gazing around, as if to assure herself that she was pursuing the right course,—then hurrying onward again with increased celerity.

At length she stopped at the door of a small house of sordid appearance. The shutters of the lower windows were all closed; but from the upper casements a feeble light glimmered forth—its flickering rays playing faintly on the opposite building.

It was at the door of that miserable abode that Ida knocked.

The summons remained for a long time unanswered; she did not, however, repeat it. She knew the habits of the inmate well.

At length the door was cautiously opened, and an old woman, with hair as white as silver, and a countenance as pale as that of a corpse, appeared in the passage, holding a lamp in her hand.

Ida muttered her name, and hurried into the house.

The door was immediately closed, and the old woman led the way up a narrow staircase to a large room, with the interior of which we must make our readers well acquainted.

In one corner was a large cupboard, the door of which stood open, and revealed a number of shelves covered with bottles of fantastic shapes, various sizes, and different colours. Some of the phials were of stained glass; others borrowed their tints from the liquids which they contained.

Near the fire-place stood a table, on which were a crucible, alembic, retort, and several other chemical



instruments. A large marble mortar, with a pestle of the same material, filled a recess between the cupboard and the chimney. On the mantel lay a glass mask.

In another corner of the room was a hutch, or wooden cage, containing several rabbits.

Near the hutch was a large box, the lid of which was perforated with innumerable small holes.

The atmosphere of this room was close and fetid, and impregnated with the odours of chemical substances.

On a shelf which ran all along the wall, on one side of the apartment, were large glass jars, wherein were preserved in spirits of wine various objects more useful to the anatomical experimentalist than pleasing to the gaze of the uninitiated beholder. These jars were all hermetically covered with parchment and wax. One contained the corpse of a monster-child, with two perfect bodies and only one head; another held an infant specimen of nature's frolics, its head having an enormous wen or swelling on the crown;—a third displayed through its transparent side the horrible coils of a huge black snake;—a fourth enclosed some rare and hideous species of toad;—a fifth contained a human heart pierced with a silver skewer;—and the others, to the number of twenty, were filled with objects equally revolting to the eye.

Beneath this shelf stood a large wooden case, with glass doors; and within were curiously fashioned wax-work representations of the various internal parts of the human frame—the heart, liver, lungs, spleen, entrails, brain, &c. They were all coloured with due regard to the actual reality; and so perfect were these anatomical models, that they appeared, at a first glance, to be the still warm and palpitating portions of a recently dissected human being.

One word relative to the old woman herself, and we will proceed.

She was of unusual height for a female; and, though seventy winters had shed their snows upon her hair, her form was unshrunken, as if time weighed not with a heavy burden upon her shoulders.

Her eyes were gray, glassy, and motionless; they never seemed to be for a moment averted from the countenance of the person with whom their possessor was conversing, save when her head itself was turned aside.

Her face was entirely colourless; it was as white as that of a corpse, a thin blueish streak marking the lips.

Although her eyes were of the light hue described, and her complexion never could have been shaded with the slightest tint of that lustre which marks the children of southern climes, this woman was nevertheless an Italian, and her name was Fontana.

"Sit down, my child," she said, as she introduced Ida into her apartment. "What can I do for thee this evening?"

"Signora," answered Ida, "I require a drug which will be long—very long in its operation; so that the cause of that gradual decay which it will produce cannot be suspected."

"I can give thee a transparent liquid of which six drops will prove fatal, leading slowly but surely to the tomb—"

"How long will it be in thus operating?" demanded Ida, impatiently.

"Six weeks, my pretty bird," answered the old woman.

"Oh! that time is too short," exclaimed Ida; "so rapid a change from health to a fatal sickness would create suspicion—and, in using it, I shall have to deceive the most wary of men."

"It is, then, for a man?" said the woman.

"No, it is for a female," replied the Baroness, "But she is married to a man whose suspicions would be easily aroused; and, did they fall on me, he would perhaps loathe me!"

"I comprehend you, my beautiful lady," said Signora Fontana, who never spared her compliments where she knew that flattery was welcome. "You wish to remove a certain female, but under appearances so natural that her husband may not suspect foul play?"

"Precisely so," answered Ida. "Can you assist me?"

"The drug that I gave you on a former occasion—"

"Well, well!—we will not allude to that," interrupted Ida. "See—here is a purse full of gold; wilt thou earn it ere I leave thee?"

"I will," returned the old woman. "I now bethink me of a compound which will produce a gradual and imperceptibly increasing decay of strength, accompanied by a disgust for life, a want of appetite, and an aggravating thirst—but without bodily pain, fever, inflammation, or convulsions—and at length terminating in death. When once this poison is in the system, there is no antidote

which human skill can devise to meet it; neither is there any test by which its presence can be detected."

"That is the drug I require," exclaimed the Baroness, a ferocious joy flashing from her dark black eyes. "Let it conduct its victim so slowly—so gradually to the tomb, that a year or more may elapse while it works its insidious way to the spot where the last spark of life cherishes its vitality."

"You shall be obeyed," said the poison-vender. "Have you the courage to remain here while I mix the compound?"

"Yes," answered the Baroness; "I would fain see the process."

Signora Fontana rose from her seat, and, approaching the cupboard, took from it several phials which she placed upon the table.

From the contents of these bottles she composed a mixture, measuring the quantities of the fluid ingredients with the nicest care.

Then she turned to the rabbit hutch, and took thence one of the innocent little creatures that were disporting so playfully within.

"I had these rabbits brought to me ere now," she observed, "for some experiments that I intend to make during the night. Here also are living things that are necessary to me in my art," she added, as she opened the box, the lid of which was perforated with innumerable small holes.

Ida approached the box; but she started back with an exclamation of horror. Twined together on a piece of flannel, a knot of hideous snakes agitated their slimy folds, wrenching themselves into a horrible mass, amongst which their eyes glistened with that peculiar light which belongs to the reptile species.

The poison-vender laughed at Ida's alarm, and plunging her hand into the box, caught up several of the snakes, which hissed and thrust forth their forked tongues—it might be in playfulness—as they twisted themselves round her naked arm.

"Holy Virgin! cease this folly," ejaculated Ida.

"There is nothing to be afraid of, my charming lady," returned the poison-vender; "they will not hurt me;" and she tossed the reptiles back again into the box, the lid of which she closed.

"Are they not venomous?" demanded Ida, who now breathed more freely.

"The poison secreted in their jaws is of the most deadly description, and will all be distilled this night ere I seek rest," replied Signor Fontana: "but I had steeped my arms a few minutes before you entered in a certain liquid which renders the flesh nauseous to their taste when their tongue comes in contact with it."

The poison-vender now continued her task.

Seating herself upon a stool, she held the rabbit between her knees, and poured down its throat a few drops of the liquid moisture which she had compounded.

She then placed the rabbit upon the floor.

The little animal ran merrily about the room for a short time; but at the expiration of a few minutes it slackened its pace, and dragged itself along with difficulty:—a sense of weakness seemed to increase upon it: it languished palpably in the presence of the experimentalist and Ida; until at length it sank and expired without a moan, and apparently without a pang.

There was a clepsydra upon the mantel; and by its aid the poison-vender ascertained that death had ensued precisely sixteen minutes after the administration of the poison.

"Thus is it," she coolly observed, "that I can form an accurate idea of the strength of my mixture. It is too powerful even now. I will trouble your sweet ladyship to move as far as possible from the fire."

Ida obeyed this request. The old woman poured the mixture into an iron vessel, which she set on the embers. She then opened the door and the window for the purpose of creating a draught to carry away the exhalations of the poison; and, when she had adopted this precaution, she fixed the glass mask upon her countenance.

Ida watched her with profound attention and curiosity. The old woman stooped over the fire, and fanned the embers with her long, thin, withered hands.

The languid flame played on the transparent mask, and rendered the corpse-like countenance of the poison-vender absolutely ghastly.

She seemed as if she were a witch who had paid the debt of nature, but whose resuscitated corpse had emerged from the tomb, in that dark hour of night, to superintend some mystic and horrible rite belonging to her ancient craft.

Her appearance, with her silvery hair flowing down her back, and with the flames reflected in the transparent mask behind which was that ghastly countenance with its stony, death-like eyes,—her appearance was more than hideous—it was horrible.

Even Ida—that woman of iron nerves and desperate purpose,—that woman who, though so young, had plunged so boldly into crime,—even she trembled as she contemplated the revolting spectacle.

She cast a hurried glance around her: the shelf covered with glasses containing frightful monsters—the cupboard in the recesses of which were poisons of the most deadly nature—the case wherein the wax-work representations had so terrible an aspect of reality—the box enclosing that knot of hissing, twining snakes—and the spectre-like being that hung over the fire, pursuing her terrible avocation,—all these combined to fill the soul of the Baroness of Czernin with indescribable terror.

But suddenly a strange dizziness seized upon her: the fumes of the poison, emanating from the retort, penetrated to her brain: she endeavoured to rise from her chair;—but she could not; and she sank in a profound lethargy.

And then all the horrors which she had just contemplated, were re-produced with frightfully exaggerated hues and shapes in her imagination. The room suddenly appeared to swarm with life. The hideous monsters in the glass jars opened their eyes—moved their limbs—and danced up and down in their transparent tenements. The waxen representations in the case palpitated visibly, while a thin vapour steamed around them, and black drops of gore dripped down from them. A small cupboard at the further end of the room threw open its door spontaneously, and within was a human skeleton, that grinned with its eyeless skull, and danced up and down with its rattling bones. Then from the box glided forth the hissing snakes; and creeping rapidly along, they twined themselves around the sleeper's limbs, their cold slimy coils touching her flesh, making the blood freeze in her veins, and producing a feeling of indescribable horror. At the same time a corpse, in its winding-sheet, hung over the fire, fanning the embers with its putrid breadth, and stirring up some deadly hell-broth with its white and ghastly hands. In another moment the corpse turned away from the fire, and advancing in its grave-clothes towards the sleeper, extended the steaming poison towards her, exclaiming in a deep and sepulchral voice, "It is ready."

Ida awoke with a loud scream.

"It is ready!" repeated the voice.

She started up, and glanced rapidly around her—almost expecting to find the horrors which she had dreamt really enacting around her, and the serpents encircling her limbs in their revolting folds.

But in another moment she became aware that those horrors had only existed in a vision; and the old woman, now divested of her mask, stood before her.

"How long have I slept?" she demanded, hastily.

"A good hour," replied the poison-vender. "The fumes of this mixture overpowered you. But wherefore that cry with which you awoke?"

"Oh! I had a fearful dream—a very fearful dream," returned Ida, actually shaking herself to get rid of that cold, chilling sensation which the horror of the vision had left behind it.

"I remember!" ejaculated the old woman, her ghastly countenance expanding into a witch-like smile: "this is the first of May—the Walpurgis night—the time when evil spirits have power over our dreams! Ah! my sweet lady, you have been plunged into a Walpurgis vision!"

"Assuredly your Italian wisdom must revolt against the gross German superstition?" exclaimed Ida, in a contemptuous tone. "At all events, there is not a sufficiency of German blood in my veins to waft my spirit on the stream of such idle beliefs. But enough of that. May I never dream so horribly again. Is the mixture prepared?"

"It is here," answered the old woman, placing a small crystal phial in Ida's hand. "Six drops of that liquid will produce a lingering decay that must terminate in death one year after the victim imbibes the dose. See!" she continued, in a tone of triumph: "the fire has rendered it white and colourless. It is also tasteless. Nothing can be more easy than to administer it."

"Enough. Here is your gold," said the Baroness.

The old woman clutched the purse with greedy hands; and, while nothing else on earth could extract a spark of fire from her glassy eyes, the presence of gold possessed the power of awakening a short and evanescent gleam of brilliancy in those dull orbs.

Carefully concealing the fatal phial in her bosom—thus placing nature's subtle venom against the heart wherein lurked the most fatal moral poison—Ida took her leave of Signora Fontana, and hurried back to her own dwelling.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE ARTIST.

EARLY on the following morning a young artist rose from his humble couch in a miserable garret in Vienna.

Having hastily dressed himself, he took from a cupboard a small piece of stale coarse bread, a pitcher of water, and a few cresses.

Upon this sorry fare he made his breakfast.

When the bread and the cresses had disappeared, he threw himself back in his chair—the only one there was in the room—and mused aloud.

"The bread is gone, and the cresses are gone," he said. "But the latter can be obtained with a little trouble from the nearest stream outside the walls of this great city. The same source will replenish my pitcher: or I need not even go so far to fill it! But the bread—the bread," he added, bitterly; "whence is that to come? It does not grow like the herbs and wild-fruits, ready to be plucked. It must be bought with money! Ah! money—and I have not the smallest copper coin that bears the imperial initial, remaining in my purse! To think that in this wonderful city, to which so many persons flock from all parts of Germany to push their fortunes—where wealth seems to be boundless, and luxury has reached such an extraordinary height—to think that I should vainly toil and strive to earn an honest crust—I, who demand no more! And yet the old picture-dealer declares that I have some talent—some little talent; but then comes the withering—blighting assurance that the arts require patrons, and that he can give me but a miserable trifle for my paintings! Another month—an entire month must pass, ere I can perfect my '*Death of Achilles*;' and how am I to exist in the interval? My sister?—no! my vow prevents me from intruding myself upon her! Let her retain her riches, earned by her guilt: I would not, even though I were released from that vow—I would not receive assistance at her hands. But I must have bread—I cannot starve! Alas! these sad thoughts unnerve me. Let me contemplate my picture: it will give me courage! And perhaps," he added, slowly, as he rose from his seat,—“perhaps if I show it to the old dealer, he will advance me a few small coins in order to secure it when completed!”

Animated with this hope—and wretched indeed must that heart be which hope will not animate!—the young artist advanced towards his easel; and, removing the linen cloth which covered the painting, he surveyed it with eyes of delight.

For several months had he been engaged in that task—working all day, and sometimes a considerable portion of the night—living upon a crust and a few cresses or wild fruits, that he might husband his slender resources so as to avoid the necessity of hurrying his work in order to procure its price—and bestowing upon it all his talent, all his taste, and all his skill.

He smiled as he contemplated it.

"Another month will be required to perfect that picture," he said; "and I cannot hold out another week—for I have not a crust and I have not a friend!"

"Be not too sure of that," observed a calm and quiet voice behind him.

The artist turned round, and beheld a venerable-looking man, with a long white beard flowing on his breast, standing at his elbow.

"You were so profoundly wrapped up in admiration of your picture," said the old man, his benevolent countenance expanding into a good-humoured smile, "that you did not hear me knock; and I therefore took the liberty of walking in."

"Walking in!" repeated the artist; "that was impossible—the door was locked!"

"Not so," answered the venerable stranger; and, advancing towards the door, he threw it open.

"That is a sufficient proof of my error," said the young artist, closing the door again. "I must have forgotten to lock it last night ere I retired to rest. The truth is, kind sir," he continued, "we all have our little feelings of pride—"

"Pride!" ejaculated the stranger, his benevolent countenance suddenly assuming an expression of withering contempt, "Are you ashamed of your poverty?"

Can you help it? Are you not struggling energetically to triumph over it? Oh! this abominable sentiment of pride, which makes men blush at that very obscurity and indigence which so often urges them to great achievements and glorious deeds! Do you think, young man, that if all were born rich, that there would be any scope for honourable ambition and emulation? Do not talk to me of pride! Had you not been poor—had not your room required even the common necessities of life, sir, you would not have received this visit from me."

"How know you, sir," asked the artist, blushing deeply at these reproofs, "that I am so thoroughly destitute as you describe me to be!"

"How do I know it?" repeated the old man, still sternly and bitterly: "can you deny it?"

And he glanced significantly around the naked walls,—his eyes resting with a most provoking scrutiny upon the miserable bed—the solitary chair—the rickety table—the chipped ewer—the broken panes—the empty shelves,—and then fixing their glances altogether for some moments upon the faded garments of the artist himself.

"Can you deny it?" again demanded the old man.

"Heaven knows that I cannot!" exclaimed the young man, bitterly; and he burst into tears.

"You need not invoke heaven to bear testimony to your condition," said the old man, in a very serious tone.

"How long will it take you to perfect that picture?"

"One month," answered the artist, brushing away his tears—for this question inspired hope.

"And of course you intend to dispose of it?" continued the venerable stranger.

"Such is my desire—such my earnest prayer," was the hasty reply.

"How much would the picture-dealer in the next street give you for it?" demanded the old man.

"Rather let me ask how you happen to know that I have any dealings with that individual?" said the young artist, surveying his strange visitor with surprise.

"Suppose that he is in reality a good-hearted man—suppose that he knew me to be a patron of the arts—suppose that he mentioned your name favourably, and hinted at your poverty," continued the stranger, whose countenance had resumed its benevolent expression,— "what then?"

"If I suppose all that," answered the artist, "it will account for the honour your presence confers upon my garret."

"There! give things their right names!" exclaimed the old man. "You called this a garret—and surely enough it is one. But it must not be your abode any longer."

The artist's pale countenance became radiant with joy, as these words—uttered emphatically, and full of hope as they were—met his ears.

"No—you must assume a position worthy of your talents," continued the old man.

His talents! Then he really did possess talents; for a patron of the fine arts—an individual who must be a judge in that sphere—had intimated as much. So thought the young artist, as he glanced towards his picture.

The old gentleman seemed to read what was passing in his mind.

"Yes—you have talents," he said; "and that *Achilles* is a proof of it. In a word, I am come to offer you a price for your picture. Will two thousand crowns meet your aspirations?"

"Two thousand crowns!" repeated the artist. "Oh! sir—can you, who have penetrated into all the mysteries and secrets of my poverty,—can you thus banter me—trifle with me—"

His words were cut short; for the old man threw a heavy purse of gold upon the table, saying in a calm and deliberate manner, "There is half the amount I offered: take it as an earnest."

The artist fell at the feet of this friend whom Heaven seemed to have sent him in the hour of his pinching need.

But to the young man's astonishment, the venerable stranger burst out into a loud and ironical laugh.

The artist rose abashed.

"Never kneel, young man, to anyone in human shape," said his singular and (as he thought) eccentric visitor; "for you know not whom you may thus worship. There is your money: is it a bargain? Two thousand crowns for the picture?"

"Your generosity far exceeds my most sanguine expectations," was the reply; "so far—so very far, that I know not whether I ought—"

"Whether you ought to take the amount," added the old man, impatiently. "Do not hesitate—it is nothing

to me, and it is much to you. The picture will therefore become mine, when you have completed it. That affair is settled. I have now to speak to you on a subject equally important,—if not more so,—at least to another. Are you prepared to testify your good will towards me, in return for the slight service which I have rendered you?"

"Can you ask me the question?" exclaimed the artist, in a tone replete with gratitude. "You may command me now—and for ever."

"You are most indiscreet in your language, young sir," said the old man. "How can you pledge yourself for ever to one whose name you do not even know? But let that pass. I must have some conversation with you. I will take your single chair: do you seat yourself upon your couch; and we shall discourse more at our ease."

The artist did as he was desired: his singular visitor deposited himself in the chair; and then spoke in the following manner.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE ANTIDOTE.

"In the first place, my dear young friend," said the venerable old man, addressing himself to the artist, "I must prove to you that I am fully acquainted with certain private details connected with your family,—the more readily to induce you to place implicit confidence in me. I have already shown you that I am no stranger to all which immediately relates to yourself."

"And you have availed yourself of that knowledge to effect the most generous purposes," interrupted the young artist.

"I am glad you think so," said the old gentleman.

"But, to be brief, I must tell you that although you pass under a feigned name in this city, you are known to me. You are Otto Pianalla."

"Some fiend must have told you that!" exclaimed the young artist, bounding on the bed where he was seated.

"Do not interrupt me, Otto," continued the old gentleman, with a singular smile, the meaning of which was unintelligible to the artist. "You discovered the intrigue which existed between your sister Ida and the Count of Aurana—and—"

"And I challenged that false lord to an equal conflict," added Pianalla, hastily.

"Equal, indeed!" repeated the stranger, ironically.

"He disarmed you at the first blow!"

"And yet I was not a coward," observed the artist, bitterly; "but I was faint—weak—famished—"

"I know it all," interrupted the old man. "With the point of his sword at your throat, Faust compelled you to take a vow that you would never molest him nor his paramour again."

"All this is as true as if you had been a witness of the whole transaction," exclaimed the young artist; "and yet the night was dark, and the sky overclouded, and naught, save the eye of Heaven—"

"Nay, nay," cried the old man, impatiently, "it was precisely on account of the almost utter darkness of the night, that neither you nor your foe dreamt of the presence of a witness concealed amongst the trees. You see that I know all."

"And what must you think of me when you reflect that I accepted my life at the hands of the man who has dishonoured my sister?" cried Otto, blushing deeply. "But let me not lose your good opinion on that account, I implore you! I had compelled the villain to acknowledge his child: I had forced him to cross swords with me; and, when I lay powerless at his feet, of what avail was my poor life to him? Had I not done all that mortal could do in behalf of the dishonoured name of his family?"

"Your conduct needs no apology, young man," returned the venerable stranger. "Mortals cling instinctively to their wretched existence," he added with some bitterness of manner, "as the miser hugs his coffer,—even while that life, like the miser's gold, is the source of naught save pain, apprehension, and anxiety."

"How is it that one so benevolent in appearance and in deeds as you, can entertain ideas which reflect so little honour upon the human race?" asked Otto, who surveyed and listened to his companion with varying sentiments of surprise, respect, and vague suspicion.

"Were I to answer thee, young man," was the solemn reply, "I should tell a tale which it neither suits me to relate, nor would become thee to hear. Let us return to the main topic of our conversation. You have obeyed

the vow which you pledged to Faust; you have adopted a feigned name, and you have struggled for your bread. That conflict with the world is now over; for there lies the gold that may prove the foundation-stone of thy fortune. But neither thy past sufferings nor thine approaching prosperity should make thee forgetful of the welfare of others."

"Nor shall my heart ever be so hardened, sir!" ejaculated Otto. "You have acted as my friend,—you are intimately acquainted with all that concerns me. Show me how I can prove myself worthy of your esteem—deserving of your confidence."

"I will put you to that test," said the old man. "The Lady Theresa incurs at this moment the greatest possible danger."

"That amiable lady who is wedded to a man so utterly unworthy of her!" cried Otto, his countenance glowing with indignation.

"You possess a chivalrous spirit," said the stranger; "I could not have addressed myself to one who is better qualified to undertake the task of saving the deceived and yet unsuspecting wife of Faust from the terrific peril which hangs over her head."

"Never that peril be," exclaimed Otto, his enthusiasm kindling as the stranger thus appealed to his generous feelings, "name it, and I will constitute myself her champion;—unless, indeed," he added, mournfully,—"unless, by so doing, I forfeit the pledge I made to her unworthy husband."

"You can save her; and yet your interference shall remain unknown to Faust or his guilty paramour, Ida," said the old man. "In one word, her life is menaced—a subtle poison is prepared for her—and this evening will it be administered!"

"Holy Virgin! can such things be?" ejaculated Otto, with horror expressed upon his countenance.

"My good young man, you know but little of this world if you suppose that a wretch like your sister Ida will consent to remain the partner of that brutal man to whom Faust, in order to serve his own purposes, induced her to link herself."

"And can it be my own sister—Ida—she, to whom my mother, on the bed of death, left a blessing,—can it be—"

"All that I tell you is as true as that yonder is your picture, and that here is your gold!" exclaimed the old man. "Will you follow my counsel, and yet ask me no questions?"

"I see that you are anxious to prevent a crime," answered Pianalla; "and Heaven knows how readily I will second you in your generous endeavours. Besides, have you not shown me every inducement to put confidence in you. Speak: I will obey."

"Ida possesses a poison against which she has been taught to believe there exists no antidote," said the old man: "but here—here," he continued, taking a small crystal phial, filled with a colourless fluid, from his doublet,—"*here* is an essence which will counteract the most virulent venom that mortal ingenuity can distil from the substances of earth."

"You would have me present that precious talisman to the Countess of Auran?" demanded Otto.

"Silly boy!" ejaculated the old man; "dost thou think that she would willingly partake of that essence, unless she received ample explanation from the lips of him who proffered it? And would you advise that her life should be embittered by the knowledge of her husband's criminal intrigue with her who was once her menial?"

"Does Faust then know of the horrible intentions of my sister?" asked Pianalla.

"No," replied the old man. "He still loves Theresa in his own way—in the way of his own bad heart;—but he loves Ida also. This singular state of mind may account to you for the marriage which he effected between your sister and the Baron of Czernin. In administering the poison to Theresa, Ida consults her own ambitious schemes only—follows the evil intentions of her own heart alone. But were you to reveal even this much to Theresa, the explanation would be incomplete and unsatisfactory to that lady, for she would ask, '*Why does Ida wish me ill?*'"

"I understand you," observed Otto. "Theresa must drink of that elixir without being aware that she partakes of it. "But how is this to be effected?"

"By your aid," answered the old man. "This evening there will be a banquet at Auran mansion. Ida will no doubt contrive to seat herself next to the Countess, and will most probably seize an opportunity to infuse the contents of her phial into the cup of her unsuspecting

friend. Within four-and-twenty hours from that moment must the Countess swallow the antidote, or its virtue will be of no avail. To-morrow Faust has engagements in Vienna, and will be absent from his mansion during the day. You must see Theresa upon some excuse,—you must enjoin her, on certain grounds which you cannot explain, not to speak to her husband of your visit,—and you will doubtless find some opportunity of effecting your purpose."

"A thousand difficulties present themselves in my imagination, to that project," said Otto.

"The resolute mind overcomes all difficulties, young man," returned the stranger. "Trust to my wisdom—or rather my foresight,—and you will succeed!"

"Ah! sir,—shall I not thereby break my vow to Faust?" asked Pianalla, hastily.

"Your vow was to the effect that you would never seek to interfere again with the guilty connexion which subsists between the Count and your sister, and that your knowledge of it should remain a profound secret in your own breast. If you beheld your sister Ida thrust the Lady Theresa into the Danube, would you not plunge into the wave and rescue her?" demanded the old man. "Would your vow appear to bar the course of your own free will in such a case?"

"Your reasoning convinces me, sir," answered Otto. "Oh! heavens,—that a brother should thus be called upon to counteract the crimes of his sister!"

"Such is the world," said the old man, drily; then rising from his seat, he added, "Fail not, I enjoin thee, to follow my counsel in this instance—and, as you value my favour, treasure the secret of our conversation in your own breast. Remember,—a word incautiously dropped may lead to a fearful exposure of your sister's guilt; and the result will be the ruin of Theresa's happiness. Act with caution—yet resolutely: to-morrow evening thou wilt see me again!"

The old man hurried out of the room.

For some minutes Otto Pianalla remained buried in deep thought; and then, when he looked up and found himself alone, he fancied for an instant that he had been dreaming.

But a single glance towards the table dispelled his doubts; for there lay the gold—and there also was the crystal phial.

"Oh! Ida—Ida, my sister!" ejaculated Otto; "and art thou indeed so lost, so guilty, so depraved, that I—even I, thy brother—am called upon to save thy intended victim? Did not that blessing which was wafted to thee on the dying breath of thy poor mother, instil purer, holier thoughts into thy soul? Wretched girl—over what an abyss of misery dost thou hover;—and I—I am bound by a vow to thy paramour which restrains the hand that I would stretch out to save thee! But this old man who was here ere now, who spoke to me so familiarly on all these subjects, and who acts with so much mystery,—who can he be? How did he learn the guilty design of my sister? Perhaps he will inform me when he comes again. At all events, he means well:—Oh! yes—it is impossible that he could deceive me!"

Then Otto advanced towards the table, and took up the phial. He drew out the stopper: the liquor was without odour of any kind. He touched it with his tongue—it was tasteless.

"Haply that old man is some skilful compounder of drugs and distiller of rare juices and essences," he said to himself: "accident has made him acquainted with my sister's designs; that same accident which gave him an insight into my own affairs! Thus, while he encouraged me in my honest exertions, he resolved to put my good feelings to the test, by employing me as his agent to counteract the designs of my sister. I understand it all:—he is one who performs his charitable, his humane, and his virtuous deeds in private! Yes—he shall be obeyed! I will see Theresa: I will save her from this peril which hangs over her!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### TERESA'S SORROWS.

ON the following day, at about noon, the Countess of Auran was seated alone in her chamber.

She had dismissed her attendant, in order to commune unrestrained with herself.

For the young lady was not completely happy: there were various subjects on which her mind was somewhat ill at ease;—and yet she frequently reproached herself for being too ready to conjure up imaginary evils.

In the first place Faust was very frequently absent from her; and she was at a loss to conceive how business of any kind could demand the attention of one whose affairs evinced such illimitable prosperity as his. She did not suspect for one moment that there was a rival who claimed a portion of his love: her own purity of soul and fidelity of heart were incapable of even permitting such an idea to obtain existence, without good cause, in her breast.

At night Faust would frequently start, and even cry aloud, as if under the oppressive influence of evil dreams—and, during the day, the eyes of his affectionate wife would often detect a dark cloud suddenly overshadowing his brow. She had questioned him on those subjects;—she had intimated her fears that some secret sorrow weighed upon his soul;—but he had invariably evaded a direct reply, or else attempted to reassure her with kind words, murmured amidst soft kisses.

She had appeared to be satisfied, because she saw that any opportunity on her part, in respect to the evidences of a disturbed mind which she had recognised in him, would not tend to console him;—nevertheless, she could not help looking upon those frequent absences—those startings and ejaculations by night—and those dark moments by day, as bearing close relationship to some secret source of woe which her husband nourished.

Nor was this all which afflicted the pure mind of that lady. She had noticed,—and oh! with what intense sorrow! that Faust never bestowed a caress upon the infant Adela, unless she presented the child to him, and with an imploring glance engaged him to notice it! It had even struck her that Faust paid more attention (as well indeed he might!) towards the son of the Archduke and Maria. She endeavoured—oh! how strenuously she endeavoured to reason with herself against these suspicions; but whenever she had succeeded in convincing herself that the coldness of Faust towards Adela, and his preference in favour of the little Maximilian, were only the result of fancy on her part,—whenever she had resolved to banish such ideas in future, as unjust towards her husband, and destructive of her own happiness,—then did appearances once more arise to re-awaken all her wretched suspicions in her mind.

She knew not whether it were by dint of pondering upon this source of infelicity,—or whether it were that her tastes and affections were despotically and yet imperceptibly led by those of her husband,—but she could not conceal from herself the fact that the oftener she saw the infant Maximilian, the more attached she grew towards him. It seemed to her as if she could take him in her arms, and press him to her bosom with more heartfelt sincerity—with more enthusiastic ardour—with more tender warmth, than she experienced when caressing the little Adela. Against this feeling she wrestled—she struggled—she combatted with all her force:—she wept—she prayed—she reasoned with herself—she reproached herself—she accused herself,—she exerted all her energy to stifle the preference whose existence she could not conceal from herself, but which she deemed most wicked and unnatural.

She would sit for hours together by the bed on which Adela slept, contemplating the child's cherub countenance, and summing up all the arguments and combining all the motives she could devise, to induce herself to bestow all—all her affections on the innocent babe. Or, again, when Adela was awake, Theresa would take the infant in her arms, cover it with kisses—play with it—address it in the most endearing terms—study all its little wants and mutely expressed whims—fondle it—do all she could to make herself love it—and yet, back—back to her soul would come the terrible conviction that she would rather Adela had been Maximilian!

To a woman of Theresa's goodness of heart, virtue, and piety, such a state of mind was fraught with the most gloomy presages; and she even looked upon herself, at times, as one who outraged the finest feelings which the Deity has implanted in the heart of woman—the tenderness of maternity!

But how great was her surprise on a certain occasion—a few days previous to the one on which we find her sitting alone in her chamber, communing with herself,—how great was her surprise, we say, when, in the reciprocal outpourings of confidence, the Archduchess Maria confessed that she also had blamed herself for harbouring feelings of a parallel nature—that she, in a word, entertained the strange and mysterious conviction that she loved Adela better than the little Maximilian!

Then those noble and estimable ladies had mingled their tears together, and had essayed to solace each other;—then had they prayed in concert that the feel-

ings, which they deemed so unnatural and unholy, might be changed into the full effusion of maternal tenderness towards the legitimate objects of such love. Alas! little did they suspect that the outpourings of that affection were actually flowing in the proper channels, and that they were in reality obeying the dictates of nature, while they reproached themselves for outraging its laws. Little did they imagine that when Theresa loved Maximilian better than Adela, she was demonstrating a holy preference towards her own son; little did they deem that when Maria embraced Adela with a more heart-felt warmth than Maximilian, she was acting in obedience to those natural impulses which conducted her towards her own daughter!

But, supposing as they did that each loved the other's child better than her own, they forbore from revealing the real state of their feelings to their husbands:—and that was the only secret which they cherished, in reference to those to whom, in all other instances, they looked for counsel and advice, as well as for tenderness and love.

It must, however, be observed that the Archduke entertained no preference in respect to the children which did violence to his feelings. He loved the little Maximilian with the most sincere tenderness. In this respect, therefore, Maria was more happy than Theresa; for while the former beheld her own unaccountable preference unshared by the Archduke, the latter was compelled to admit to herself that her own peculiar feelings were, so far as she could judge, participated in by her husband!

The reader can now understand that melancholy state of mind to which the Lady Theresa was a prey, when a servant entered her room to inform her that a person requested an interview with her.

The Countess immediately proceeded to the apartment where the stranger was waiting; and it was with feelings of pleasure that she recognised Otto Pianalla. He it was who had painted the portrait of her husband, which had been a partial solace to her when Faust was a prisoner in the dungeons of Wittenberg, previously to their marriage; and this circumstance—together with the fact of the near ties of relationship which existed between Otto and Ida—induced the Countess to greet the young artist as a friend.

Otto was dressed in good but plain attire; and nothing about his appearance afforded any indication of those privations which he had suffered during the past year.

"You are welcome, Messer Pianalla," said Theresa, pointing to a seat. "But wherefore are you such a stranger amongst those whom you should believe ever willing to reckon you amongst the number of their friends?"

"Many circumstances have combined to render me the stranger your ladyship denominates me," answered Otto; "but chiefly the simplicity of my habits, which do not fit me for gay and courtly company. I may also observe that I do not approve of the matrimonial connexion which my sister has formed; and I do not even intend her to know that I am in this neighbourhood."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Theresa, with a smile; "then am I to suppose that you enjoin me secrecy on that head?"

"Such is my prayer to your ladyship," said Otto; "and I must even request that my visit may remain unknown to the Count of Aurana."

"Are you afraid that my husband will let slip in Ida's presence, the first time he sees her, a word which will make her aware of your visit to this mansion? Certainly, I have no anxiety to render Ida unhappy by allowing her to learn, directly or indirectly, your hostility to the union which she has formed; but, to speak truly, Messer Pianalla, you carry your resentment beyond the limits of generosity and propriety."

"Ah! my lady, there are secrets in all families—and ours is not an exception to the general rule. Do not judge harshly of me," continued Pianalla;—"I have not naturally a hard heart;—but there are circumstances which compel me to keep my visit to this mansion a profound secret to all save you. And now your ladyship may wonder wherefore I have ventured to intrude upon your presence!"

"Nay—there is no intrusion," said Theresa: "I received you—as I ever shall receive you, I hope—as a friend."

"I shall always study to deserve your ladyship's good opinion," returned Pianalla. "Journeying in this neighbourhood, I should have deemed myself wanting in courtesy and gratitude towards you who were so long a



kind mistress to my sister, did I not call to assure myself of your ladyship's health and happiness."

"And since you have thus rendered Aurana an honour which you will not pay to the mansion of the Baron Von Czernin in Vienna, I cannot allow you to proceed on your journey without offering you such fare as our dwelling may afford."

With these words Theresa summoned the domestics; and a collation was immediately served up.

This hospitality was precisely in accordance with Otto's views and hopes; as it afforded him an opportunity of administering the elixir to the Countess.

Availing himself of a favourable moment, he poured the contents of the small phial into her cup, which he had already nearly filled with Rhenish wine and iced water.

Then he drank to the health and happiness of herself and those who were near and dear to her; and she responded to his good wishes.

On the previous evening, at a grand festival, Ida had indeed administered Signora Fontana's poison to the Countess; but this amiable lady had now imbibed the antidote!

But whence came that antidote—since the Italian woman, who was so well skilled in all the venomous substances of the earth, had declared that no mortal could counteract that poison which she had compounded for Ida?

Who was that strange, cynical, and yet seemingly benevolent old man that employed the young artist thus to counteract Ida's infamous design?

The course of our narrative will develop these mysteries.

Otto took leave of the Countess, and returned to his attic—for he had not as yet had leisure to procure a more suitable abode.

But the old man kept not the appointment which he made with the young artist.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE GREEK LADY.

EIGHT months had elapsed since the incidents related in the three or four preceding chapters; and time had given birth to the year 1496.

It was on a beautiful frosty afternoon that the Countess Ida was walking with her paramour, Faust, in a secluded part of the ramparts of the imperial city.

Their conversation was carried on in a low, yet solemn tone; Faust was the principal speaker; and his guilty mistress listened to him with the most profound attention.

"No—not even to you, Ida," said the Count of Aurana, "can I reveal all the horrors which I witnessed on that terrible occasion. I cannot explain to myself how it was that I was enabled to brace my nerves with the sufficient courage to undertake that dreadful venture. My curiosity was, however, intense, and a superhuman power seemed to support me. But, oh! with what feelings did I pursue my way amidst the convulsions of nature, following the steps of the fiend, who was leading me to one of the avenues of his terrible kingdom."

"And wherefore have you never spoken to me of all this before?" asked Ida. "Eight long months have elapsed since you undertook that fearful expedition; and this is the first time you have ever breathed a word concerning it in my hearing? Am I no longer worthy of your confidence?—I who am so well acquainted with the mysteries of your fate?"

"Many and many a time have I been on the point of revealing to you all I saw on that occasion, beloved Ida," answered Faust; "but my soul has revolted from the dread subject,—and I know not even now how I came to touch upon it! Perchance it is that you appear more tender to-day—more endeared to me than ever you were before; perchance it is that as time passes on so rapidly, I feel the irresistible necessity of communicating every secret of my soul to some mortal being; and no one can be the repository of my feelings save yourself! But ask me no more of what I saw in those regions where I am doomed, in a little space—a few short years, to take up my abode to all eternity: at least, question me no further on this occasion. Another time, Ida,—another time I will tell you all,—yes, all!"

"I will not compel you to ponder upon so terrible a topic," said Ida.

"Ponder on it!" ejaculated Faust, almost wildly. "Oh! when is it absent from my memory?"

"But wherefore thus despond?" asked Ida. "Have you not yet many years left to enjoy all the luxuries and pleasures of earth? Is not every delight which this world possesses within your reach?"

"Can the wine-cup taste sweet, Ida, when venom is in the dregs? Can the rose please with its odour when a poisonous reptile is concealed within its leaves?" demanded Faust, bitterly.

"The demon is your slave," said Ida, resolutely; "cannot his power supply you with some talisman against the ideas and memories which thus haunt you?"

"Ah! 'tis a happy thought, Ida!" exclaimed Faust. "I will think on it. Leave me, Ida,—I would now be alone with my reflections."

They parted.

Faust continued his moody walk along the ramparts, while Ida descended the nearest flight of steps which led into the city.

She then pursued her way rapidly homewards.

At the same moment that she reached the gate of the Czernin mansion, a female of commanding height, and closely veiled, accosted her, saying, "Tell me, kind lady, is this the abode of the Baron of Czernin?"

These words were uttered in a sweet but melancholy tone, and in perfectly good German, though with a foreign accent. The costume of the stranger was also different from that usually worn by German women, and seemed rather to belong to some oriental clime.

"This is the mansion of the Baron of Czernin," answered Ida. "Do you wish to see any of its inmates?"

"My business is with the Baron himself, lady," was the reply; and as the stranger spoke she partially drew aside her veil.

Ida then beheld the lovely but melancholy and care-worn countenance of a woman whose age was apparently thirty. Her complexion was that of a brunette; her eyes were large, dark, and melting; and nothing could equal the splendour of her luxuriant, jet black hair. There was something queenly—something commanding in that beauty which was thus suddenly revealed to the Baroness of Czernin. The high forehead, the admirable Grecian outline of feature, the thin vermilion lips, the pearly teeth, and the swan-like neck, formed an assemblage of charms, which for an instant dazzled even Ida; and it was in a tone expressive of more courtesy than she usually manifested towards any of her husband's visitors, that she requested the beautiful stranger to enter the mansion.

When they were alone in the principal saloon together, Ida summoned Gertrude, and inquired if the Baron were at home.

The reply was in the negative.

The absence of her husband at that moment was exactly suitable to Ida's views, for she longed to ascertain what connexion could possibly exist between the elegant woman who now sat beside her on the ottoman, and the Baron of Czernin.

Having made a signal for Gertrude to withdraw, Ida turned towards her guest, and said, "You hear that, his lordship is absent for the present; but he will return shortly; and if you will rest yourself in the meantime, I shall esteem myself honoured by your society."

"With your permission, lady, I will await the return of the Baron of Czernin," answered the stranger; then after a moment's pause, she said,—but apparently with an effort, "Tell me, lady, are you the Baron's wife?"

"I am the Baroness of Czernin," replied Ida.

The fair stranger surveyed her for some instants with the deepest interest; and then, as if musing to herself, she murmured, "Yes,—you are beautiful—very beautiful; and you are younger, too, than I! Oh! I need not be astonished;—and yet—"

She checked herself, and hastily dashed away the tears from her long silken lashes.

"Does my presence excite unpleasant ideas in your mind, lady?" asked Ida, who was now burning with curiosity to ascertain the cause of her guest's emotion.

"Your presence is a source of grief to me in one sense," answered the stranger in a melancholy voice; "and yet the kindness of your tone soothes my wounded spirit. Pardon me, lady,—pardon me, if I see in you a successful rival; and yet, Heaven knows, that I am incapable of harbouring enmity or ill-feeling towards you! But tell me—has your husband ever mentioned to you the name of Irene, the daughter of the merchant of Damascus?"

"Never," answered Ida.

"It is as well that he should have forgotten me altogether, since another now possesses his love!" said the stranger, mournfully. "I am that Irene to whom I

ere now alluded; and I knew him who is now your husband, many years ago."

"Methinks that I can read in your words and manner a tale of affections early formed and eventually blighted," said the wily Baroness, in a sympathising tone. "Is it so? Speak confidentially; I can commiserate—I can console you,—but shall not blame you."

"Oh! lady, how grateful am I for these generous assurances on your part!" ejaculated Irene. "You have divined rightly! Fifteen years have now elapsed since my father, who was a Greek merchant, dwelling at Damascus, rescued a young European, who was travelling in Syria, from a horde of banditti in the desert. I will not weary you with the details of that occurrence. Suffice it to say, that the traveller was grievously wounded, and all his attendants were slain in the conflict. My father ordered his slaves to form a litter to convey him to Damascus; and on his arrival at our dwelling, every attention was administered to him. It was my duty to watch by his couch, bathe his feverish brow, and place the cooling beverage to his parched lips; for in the east, lady, there are few of our sex who are not in some degree acquainted with the healing qualities of different medicines. His recovery was long and tedious: months passed away, and he still remained weak and feeble from the wounds which he had received. At length he was enabled to leave his couch, and walk in the garden belonging to our dwelling. He leant upon my arm: he would have no other support—none other to minister to him than myself. For a year he remained with us. He told us that he was the Baron of Czernin, that he was travelling for his pleasure, and that he was possessed of great wealth and large estates in his native land. I have said enough to show you that we were much together; and you can forgive me if I add, that my first and only love was devoted to him. My father was wealthy; the riches of Demetrius Notaras were proverbial in the fair capital of Syria. There was no apparent obstacle to our happiness; for—pardon me again, lady,—if I tell you, that Theodore von Czernin proffered me his hand, as he declared I already possessed his heart."

"Proceed," said Ida, seeing that the beautiful Greek hesitated. "You cannot offend me—for neither you nor I have willingly wronged each other."

"No, lady—for you must have been a child when those events occurred; and I had numbered fourteen years—an age at which the females of that sunny land are accounted almost women. My father," continued Irene, after a short pause, "consented to our union. The preparations were made,—the day was fixed. I cannot now bear to dwell upon the happiness—the ineffable, celestial bliss which I enjoyed when walking in our delicious gardens with him I loved, and conversing on our prospects of bliss, the evening before the morn that, as I fondly hoped, was to unite us for ever."

Irene again dashed away the tears from her eyes, and conquering the emotions which these reminiscences conjured up, proceeded thus:—

"We parted soon after sunset. I retired to my own apartment to complete the preparations for my bridal; and Theodore—pardon me if I call him by that name—proceeded, as I believed, to the bazaar, to conclude some purchases which he had contemplated. But I never saw him again. He came not back to the house that evening—nor on the next day—nor on the next! His mysterious disappearance plunged my father and myself into the greatest grief. We feared that some terrible accident had overtaken him: for we believed that he was too honourable to quit us thus of his own accord. Lady, you can conceive my anguish; I cannot describe it. Week after week—month after month—year after year, passed away. My mother had died in my infancy; I was an only child; and the death of my father, about ten years ago, left me with immense wealth, but without a protector—almost without a friend. Often and often did I contemplate a journey to this far-off city, to seek him whom I never ceased to love—whose image I never ceased to cherish. But then I thought that if he should return, and not find me in Damascus, the obstacles that separated us might be increased; and I also reasoned within myself, that if he were indeed alive, and at liberty, he would fly to me if he still loved me. My only solace was the contemplation of a magnificent necklace, which he had presented to me on the eve of our intended bridal."

Irene drew from beneath the folds of the dualma, or oriental pelisse, which she wore, a small box made of sandal wood. She did not, however, immediately open it; but holding it, as it were, mechanically in her hand, she thus concluded her narrative:—

"Year after year passed away, lady—year after year of sorrow, suspense, and dying hopes! Many a wealthy youth of my own nation sought my love; but that was not mine to give. I vowed that my heart should exist as a shrine sacred only to the memory of him to whom my first affections and virgin faith were plighted. My bosom incurred his well-beloved image; and even that fidelity and that devotion on my part were as a solace to me in this long, tedious interval. At length I learnt accidentally, from a Greek merchant who arrived at Damascus, that the Baron of Czernin had returned to Vienna—returned to his native city—after an absence of twelve years. From the same source I gathered that he had claimed and recovered his sequestered property, and that he had apparently fixed himself in the German capital. It was also told me that he was leading a gay and happy life—as if to indemnify himself for years of suffering. Then my heart sank within me; and a voice seemed to whisper to me that I was beloved no longer! 'Alas!' I thought; 'perhaps he believes that I myself cannot have remained faithful to my plight, throughout this weary lapse of time.' And then I resolved to undertake a journey to Vienna—to seek him—to tell him that he knew not the heart which was devoted to him—and to restore to him this necklace which I looked upon as the pledge of his own love. My pride was aroused:—not that I entertained enmity towards him;—oh! no—I would even now die to serve him! But I felt that I could not treasure the gift of one who had either repented of his vows towards me, or who had been led to believe me faithless. Placing my property under the control of an upright Armenian merchant, who had known the family of Notaras for years, and taking with me sufficient gold and jewels to defray the expenses of my journey, I set out, attended by two faithful slaves. I need not recount the perils and difficulties of this arduous undertaking. Six months ago did I leave Damascus; and a variety of circumstances have delayed my progress. At length, last evening, I arrived in Vienna. You may well conceive that my first inquiry at the inn where I stopped, was concerning the Baron of Czernin. Then did I hear of his marriage for the first time;—for the merchant who had made me acquainted at Damascus with the particulars concerning the re-appearance of the Baron in this city, had commenced his journey to Syria before your union took place. Thus all my hopes—for, pardon me, lady, if encouraged by your sympathy and in obedience to the dictates of my own feelings, I confess that I had entertained hopes,—as who would not in my situation?—all those hopes, I say, were suddenly destroyed! Then I resolved more seriously than ever to return this necklace to him who gave it. But not a word of reproach, lady—not a syllable of blame, would have passed my lips, had I obtained an interview with your husband. No—my desire, my only remaining ambition was to relieve him of any compunction which he might feel by assuring him of my forgiveness—convincing him of my fidelity—and restoring the gift which I had once prized so highly! If I have erred, lady, in thus unbosoming my feelings to you, it has been from no improper motive:—my views are pure—my designs are holy! Nor can you reproach your husband for having forgotten those vows which he plighted in the ardour of youth, and perhaps under the influence of gratitude, rather than love,—vows which sober reflection may have taught him to regret, and which circumstances may have obliged him to recant! No—lady—this narrative cannot, must not interrupt the free course of your felicity: nor will your generous nature permit you to harbour enmity towards one who can have now no right, and assuredly has no pretensions, to be your rival!"

For a moment even Ida was affected by the touching and pathetic language of the Greek lady, who again wiped away the crystal tears from her eyes—those eyes which were dark as the midnight heaven when it appears in the light of its countless stars.

"When first I entered your hospitable mansion, lady," said Irene, after a long pause, "it was my intention to deliver this necklace into the hands of the Baron of Czernin. But your sweet sympathy has elicited my sad story; and I have no longer any pretence for remaining here. It will be better that I should not see your lord. Take this box, lady—it contains the gift of which I have spoken:—take it—return it to your husband—and tell him all that you deem it right and fitting for him to know."

Ida received the box from the hands of the Greek lady, who rose from her seat, and was about to bid the Baroness farewell, when the door suddenly opened, and the lord of the mansion himself entered the apartment,

## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE MEETING.

STRANGE was the contrast that existed between Ida von Czernin and Irene Notaras.

Both were eminently beautiful;—but their minds, how different were they! The former was possessed of the most consummate arts of hypocrisy—the latter was frankness, candour, and perfect guilelessness: the former concealed a detestable soul beneath an appearance of reserve and sedateness—the latter was endowed with the most generous feelings, which gave a charm to her ingenuous manners and discourse: the former possessed desires of fiery violence beneath that calm exterior which was so well calculated to deceive—the latter had been tutored by disappointment, sorrow, and maidenly pride to subdue the rebellious passions of youth;—the former, in a word, was a very fiend in a lovely guise—the latter was in mind and appearance as perfect as woman can be. Nor shall we blaspheme, or speak irreverently of holy things, if we declare that a lovely and virtuous woman is but one remove from the angels who are deemed worthy to hymn the praises of the Highest in realms invisible to mortal eyes!

So unsuspicious and artless was Irene Notaras, although she had reached a mature age, that she readily gave Ida credit for entertaining the deepest sympathy in her behalf; and it was this belief that had induced her so frankly, and yet so delicately, to unburden her mind to the wife of the very individual who was the hero of her history.

But this artlessness of mind on the part of a female over whose head thirty years had passed—passed, however, without dimming the lustre of her eyes, or the dark glory of her raven hair—was to be attributed to the comparative seclusion in which the life of Irene had been passed. Although a Greek and a Christian, she had nevertheless so far coincided with the customs of that oriental clime in which her native home was fixed, as to see but little of male society, and then only (since her father's death) at the houses of married female friends.

These explanations we deemed necessary in order to render our readers more familiar with the character of Irene Notaras than they would have been merely from a contemplation of her own history, as related by herself.

We said that Ida von Czernin had just received the sandal-wood box from the hands of the Greek lady, and was about to open it, when the Baron abruptly made his appearance.

Irene cast one glance towards him, and then fell back on the ottoman whence she had risen a moment previously.

"'Tis he! 'tis he!" she exclaimed, in a piercing tone; and she covered her face with her hands.

None need marvel at this ebullition of profound feeling on the part of the Greek lady. The sudden presence of the individual whose image had been for fifteen years treasured in her bosom, aroused all the fervour of that love which had long appeared to be mellowed down into a holy reminiscence that could only cease with life itself. In a moment she seemed transported back to the delicious garden in her own sunny clime, where his love was first declared, and where her vows were plighted. It appeared as if it was only yesterday that she roved, hand in hand, with him amidst the ambrosial bowers of Damascus,—the blending spirit of pure affection flashing from their eyes in warm transfusion,—while their assurances of never-changing love seemed to find echoes and witnesses in the songs of the nightingale!

But, in a moment, the convictions of reality,—rapid as the whirlwind which sweeps over the Syrian desert, and carries the waves of that ocean of sand to dash themselves against the walls of Damascus,—dispelled the pleasing illusion; and Irene was called back to the remembrance that many and many a weary year had passed since that blissful period, and that she was now in the presence of him who had forgotten her and espoused another!

"Who is this woman?" demanded the Baron, almost brutally, as the exclamation of the beautiful Greek fell upon his ears.

"My God! he does not even remember me!" ejaculated Irene, bursting into tears: then, hastily rising from the ottoman, she dashed away the crystal drops from her long dark lashes, took the box gently from Ida's hand, and, drawing forth a splendid necklace, said, in a meek and subdued tone, "My lord, I have undertaken a long and painful journey to see you once again; but all that

now remains for me to do, is to restore to you this costly jewel, which you presented to me in times long past and—and—by you forgotten."

A gleam of light appeared to dawn upon the Baron's mind as the Greek lady thus addressed him; and, as if with a painful effort—or, rather, with great embarrassment of manner, he stammered out a few words.

"Yes—I remember now—you are Irene Notaras, the merchant's daughter—and that necklace—yes—I gave it to you, as you say—in different times—and—and—I hope there is no ill-feeling—"

While the Baron of Czernin, who had certainly been partaking of a due allowance of some potent beverage, was thus blundering amidst expressions and apologies of a somewhat extraordinary, and undoubtedly of a very unfeeling nature, towards the amiable and confiding woman who had endured so much on his account, a singular change took place in that lady's countenance and manner.

When first the Baron had exclaimed "Who is this woman?" the words themselves, rather than the tone, had aroused those painful emotions in her bosom, which had found a vent in tears. But when he addressed her again, his voice, thick and husky with semi-intoxication, sounded so unmusically upon Irene's ears, that she started: a strange—a wild suspicion flashed to her imagination;—her large dark eyes were fixed with mingled terror and astonishment upon the Baron's countenance;—he trembled beneath those glances which appeared to penetrate into the very depths of his soul;—and as he beheld those dark eyes dilate with indignation and pride—as he marked the cloud gather on the lady's brow—he hesitated in his speech, and at length stopped short altogether, unable to utter another word.

There was a solemn pause for a few moments:—Ida glanced from the Baron to the Greek lady, and back again to her husband in dumb astonishment, not unmingled with vague apprehension;—the Baron himself appeared to be the prey of ineffable emotions;—and Irene seemed totally unable to take her eyes off him.

But this mysterious state of suspense was soon and suddenly interrupted.

As if inspired by a deep conviction, and with almost an agonizing wildness of manner, Irene clasped her hands together, exclaiming, "No—no! I cannot be deceived! You are not the Theodore to whom I plighted my troth—you are not the one whose image is so profoundly impressed upon my heart!"

Then, as if actuated by some sudden impulse, Irene thrust the necklace into the bosom of her dualma, and hastened from the room.

The door did not close behind her, for as she left the apartment Schurmann entered it.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## VAIN MENACES.—THE GLASS MASK.

A FLUSH of deep indignation appeared on the brow of Ida von Czernin when the hated Schurmann thus abruptly made his appearance.

"Well, my lord," he exclaimed, familiarly slapping the shoulder of the Baron, who, with folded arms was gazing in moody vacancy upon the floor, "what ails your high and excellent nobility to-day? Is the wine-store empty? or have you come to the bottom of the treasury-box?"

"Ah, Schurmann!" ejaculated the Baron, impatiently; "what brings you hither again?"

"My affection for your lordship, to be sure," cried Schurmann, throwing himself upon the sofa where the beautiful Greek lady had so lately been seated. "Nay, my beauty," he continued, addressing himself to Ida, "do not spoil that pretty countenance by contracting it with frowns. There is the less need of your anger, too, because it produces no effect upon me."

"Insolent menial!" ejaculated Ida, turning aside from the intruder with supreme contempt.

"Ah! I am used to your civilities, my lady," said Schurmann, coolly. "Baron, my noble friend, summon those lazy domestics of yours, and tell them to serve us up a right noble banquet, for I am both a-hungered and a-thirst."

"My lord," exclaimed Ida, advancing towards her husband, "I have but few words to say—and to those I request your earnest attention. If this man be allowed the privilege of introducing himself on your privacy at his good pleasure, you may enjoy your friend's society without restraint, because I shall forthwith leave a dwelling where I am no longer the mistress."

"Ida—do not perplex me," returned the Baron, in a low and imploring tone; "God knows I am bewildered enough already! Leave us, Ida—I will speak to you anon—to-morrow—"

"No—I will not remain in this state of suspense," interrupted the Baroness. "If this man have any claims upon you, name them, and we will consult upon the best means to discharge them; but if he be a mere intruder—without a right to force himself upon us—"

"Enough of this!" cried Schurmann, rising from the sofa, and advancing towards the Baron and Ida. "Your ladyship would do well not to provoke revelations which—"

"Schurmann!" exclaimed the Baron, grasping him by the arm with convulsive violence.

"Well—I do not want to speak out," said the man, sulkily; "but make your wife hold her tongue, or else treat me with a little more civility. Does she take me for a dog, that she endeavours to trample upon me? Just as if I hadn't heard who she was—the Countess of Aurana's tire-woman transformed into a Baroness! Ha! ha!" and his coarse laugh echoed through the spacious apartment.

The Italian blood of the young lady boiled in her veins; and, giving full vent to the impetuosity of her passion, she exclaimed, "Leave this house! Not another moment shall you breathe the same atmosphere with myself! Depart—or my lacqueys shall thrust you forth!"

"Baron—you hear her!" cried Schurmann, his lips turning white, and foaming with rage. By heavens, I'll—

"Silence, Schurmann, silence!" exclaimed the Baron, imploringly. "And you, Ida—leave us—I command you! Messer Schurmann is a friend of mine—an old friend; and he must be treated as my guest—an honoured guest!"

"Yes—an honoured guest," growled Schurmann, with a triumphant glance at Ida.

"Coward!" ejaculated the Baroness, throwing that irritating word at her husband; "yes—coward, I repeat—thus to permit your wife to be insulted before your face. But I will be revenged: my threats are not vain! The lacqueys shall thrust forth that low-born intruder—or I will seek another home this night."

"Ida," said the Baron of Czernin, drawing his wife aside, and speaking to her in a low but rapid and excited tone, "listen to me. You have your secrets—and I do not seek to penetrate them. Permit me to enjoy mine. Cease these vain and idle menaces; they are ridiculous—mad—insane, when levelled against that man. Remember that if your husband be disgraced—exposed—ruined, you fall with him; he drags you into the mire at the same time!"

"But who is this formidable individual, then?" demanded Ida, also sinking her voice, and glancing with mingled apprehension and disgust towards Schurmann, who had resumed his comfortable position upon the sofa: "who is the individual that thus exercises so terrible an influence over you?"

"That you will never know, Ida," answered the Baron; "unless, indeed, you goad him by your mad behaviour, to revelations which—but I need say no more. Beware how you insult him again!"

"I will know the worst at once, my lord," rejoined the impetuous woman, "rather than dwell in this state of suspense!"

"You provoke me to say rude things," whispered the Baron, grinding his teeth with rage; "but, as surely as you are undermining the ground beneath your own feet and mine by this senseless, rash, intemperate conduct—so certainly will I wreak a terrible vengeance upon you! Persist in this insulting course towards my friend,—provoke him to crush me in his rage,—and at the same moment the officers of justice shall be instructed to demand certain explanations of Ida von Czernin relative to the child which—"

"Hold! hold! my lord—you indeed know how to touch a painful chord in my heart!" she added, bitterly;—and her countenance for a moment assumed so fearful an expression of rage and vindictiveness, that all its beauty was temporarily absorbed in the contortion produced by the workings of her dark Italian passions.

The Baron was, however, glancing uneasily towards Schurmann, and perceived not that change so menacing, and yet so evanescent!

"Be it as you wish, my lord," said Ida, after a short pause, during which she so far reserved her composure as to be enabled to express herself with apparent calm-

ness:—"be it as you wish! I will intrude upon your secrets no more."

And with these words she left the room.

That calmness was indeed apparent. Where the waters of the Nile sleep the most placidly beneath the burning heat of an Egyptian sky,—there, in those dark depths that the eye of the wayfarer along the sandy shore cannot fathom, lie concealed the most hideous monsters, which, at the moment when the traveller is lulled into a belief of security by the seeming tranquillity of the broad flood, suddenly burst forth from its bosom, and seize the unsuspecting victim in those jaws, from which there is no escape!

Such was the calmness which characterized the manner of Ida von Czernin, as she addressed the above assurance to the Baron.

But, for the present, all that regarded her husband gave way to a consideration of deeper importance to herself. Six months had elapsed since the poison was administered to the Lady Theresa, and no visible change had as yet taken place in her. There was a soft and gentle smile of melancholy upon her brow; but her physical health remained unimpaired. Ida had not only watched her attentively, in order to ascertain if she experienced any internal pang which affection for her husband prompted her to conceal; she had watched her, also, to catch the first development of those symptoms that were to indicate the subtle workings of the poison,—a gradual and imperceptibly increasing decay of strength, a disgust for life, a want of appetite, and an excruciating thirst; but she had watched in vain!

Could the old poison-vender have deceived her? was the question which Ida had often put to herself during the lapse of those six months. She had frequently intended to pay another visit to Signora Fontana, in order to demand an explanation of the failure of the promised effects of the poison; but strong as was her mind, she entertained a profound horror of that den, where so many appalling sights and objects were congregated. Moreover, she appeased her impatience, from time to time, by reasoning with herself on the probability, that the poison-vender had somewhat miscalculated the potency of her draught, and that it might still produce the heinous effect so criminally desired, although not within the specified period.

But at length this argument lost its weight with Ida; and her impatience had become intolerable. She therefore determined upon another visit to the poison-vender; and while the Baron was deep in an orgie with his friend Schurmann, Ida wended her way along the narrow streets towards the old wretch's sordid abode.

The lower shutters were closed, as usual; the light streamed feebly from the casements on the first-floor. Ida knocked at the door; but her summons remained unanswered. She waited for nearly ten minutes; and no one seemed to be moving in the house.

"The old woman is so deeply engaged in her experiments or distillations," murmured Ida to herself, "that she has no ears for aught save the hissing and bubbling of her decoctions."

As she uttered these words she pushed the door impatiently. It yielded to her hand, and burst open. Ida immediately entered the house, and closed the door carefully behind her.

Then she ascended to the upper room, which was filled with a noxious odour.

The apartment presented the same appearance as when we first introduced our readers to its mysteries. The monsters still occupied their glass jars on the long shelf: the door of the cupboard was open, and revealed the bottles of fantastic shapes and various colours within;—the crucible, alembic, retort, and other chemical instruments were upon the table;—the hutch was in its place, but empty;—the large box, with the holes in the lid, was standing near it, as usual; and in the wooden case with glass doors, were the wax-work representations of the internal parts of the human frame. A lamp burnt on the table.

The huge marble mortar, which, with its pedestal, was about three feet and a half high, was alone, of all the objects in the room, out of its usual place. It stood in front of the grate, where a few embers were smouldering.

But was the old woman in her den?

Yes—seated on a chair near the fire, and with her head leaning on the edge of the mortar, Signora Fontana appeared to be contemplating the drugs which she was compounding in the marble vessel.

Ida drew near, but as she approached the mortar, a

powerful exhalation from its contents produced a sudden feeling of sickness in the stomach and dizziness in the head. She hurried to the window, and opened the casement.

The pure air immediately refreshed her, and dispelled the noxious vapour from the apartment.

But all this time the old woman did not move.

A fearful suspicion flashed to the mind of the Baroness; and her first impulse was to hasten from the room. But, in the next instant, she felt ashamed of her fears, and once more approached the motionless form whose head was supported on the mortar.

When near the base of the pedestal, Ida's foot crushed some little substance: she glanced downwards, and beheld several fragments of the poison-vender's glass mask scattered upon the floor.

Ida's suspicions were strengthened; and a glance—a hurried glance—at the old woman's countenance, confirmed them.

While in the act of compounding poisons of a most insidious malignity, the mask had fallen from her face, and the exhalation or impalpable powder of the drugs had entered her throat and nostrils.

Death must have been instantaneous!

But if the countenance of the hag were horrible in life, how indescribably hideous and revolting was it now that the grim monster had placed his finger on all its lineaments.

Ida turned away with more of disgust than fear—for the presence of death had but little terrors for her powerful, though deeply guilty, mind.

Not a sentiment of pity did she experience for the old Italian who had at length met her doom by the very means which she was devising to hasten the destruction of others:—no—Ida had not such a thing as compassion in her soul.

But she entertained a deep feeling of disappointment at the sudden removal of the poison-vender from a sphere in which her damnable skill had been of such fearful use to those who were criminal enough to avail themselves of her proficiency in the chemical art.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE JULIAN ALPS.

Oh, what a paradise were this world, did not the evil passions of its denizens too oft convert it into the semblance of another sphere whose name is the representative of all conceivable horrors.

When the land is rich and glorious with the golden harvests, and the husbandman joyfully contemplates the garnering of the reward of his industry, grim war carries its desolation over the country, and converts the promise of abundance into a barren waste. When the merchant is on his way homeward, travel-weary and anxious to embrace his wife and little ones, from whom he has been long absent, but for whose benefit he has amassed treasures by means of his honest toil, the dagger of the midnight robber is suddenly buried in his breast, and a thousand fond hopes and aspirations, nourished alike by him and those who await his coming, are cruelly annihilated in an instant! When some good and virtuous monarch has devoted his life to the establishment of his people's happiness, and his subjects are enjoying the full amount of that prosperity which a wise rule has created, the hand of death tears the generous prince from his throne, and leaves the nation to the tyranny or misrule of his successor.

How grand are all the principles of human happiness: how deeply ramified are all the principles of human misery!

That constant strife for gold—that warring by day and intrigue by night to obtain the dross whose spells are so potent, whose magic is so prolific—that intense ardour to be first in the busy race after the world's idol, no matter who may be trampled and crushed by the way—that breathless anxiety to outstrip a neighbour, at any sacrifice, and even by means of a crime—that eager thirst to drink the largest draughts of a river which God intended to flow for the moderate benefit of all—that jostling, pressing, hurrying, crowding, elbowing, confusion, violence, stratagem, supplanting, intriguing, and waylaying which constitute the avocations of the world's mob, are the active elements of a hostility to human peace, sympathy, and benevolence.

The doctrine of fellowship and good-will flows from hundreds of thousands of pulpits; millions and millions of treasure are expended to maintain the ministers of the

"tidings of great joy" that were proclaimed to mankind; and yet, with all its vaunted civilization, the world is still barbarous in respect to those amenities and charities which sweeten existence.

Thus thought Otto Pianalla, as he rode slowly along a narrow path which wound its way in the midst of a dense forest in the province of Carniola. He had seen so much of the vices and crimes of Vienna that he had determined to indulge his taste for the primitive simplicity of those districts where the hardy forester and bold mountaineer yet remained uncontaminated by the luxury of great cities.

Mounted on a powerful but docile steed, and unattended, but well armed, the young artist was enabled (thanks to the gold which he had received from the mysterious stranger a year previously to the time of which we are now writing) to wander amidst scenes congenial to his disposition.

Having crossed the Lobel mountains, many of the summits of which are covered with everlasting snow, the young man pursued his way by easy stages through the province of Carniola, towards the Julian Alps.

He was now in the midst of a dense forest, the southern verge of which he hoped to gain before sunset.

He had an interval of three hours before him; and he urged his steed onward at a quicker pace than usual.

Nor had the hospitable peasants, at whose abode he had passed the preceding night, misled him in respect to the direction they had given him for his day's journey. For scarcely had he emerged from the forest when the last rays of the April sun glittered over the welcome hills, and were reflected from the snow-capped heights of the Julian Alps.

And now layer after layer of heavy clouds were rolled over the deep blue sky; but still an occasional chasm in those dense masses enabled the eye to catch a glimpse of the white peaks which glistened with their own natural brightness.

At a short distance from the verge of the forest stood a small cottage, where Otto obtained hospitality for the night.

He awoke at an early hour, just as the morning sun was struggling into being—its rays breaking slowly through the clouds, and showering a silver light upon the adjacent summits of eternal snow.

Having partaken of an excellent repast, Otto requested permission to leave his horse in the stable attached to the cot; and his demand being willingly acceded to, he set out on a ramble towards the mountains.

An hour's walk brought him to the foot of an acclivity so steep that it occupied nearly double the time just mentioned to climb it. At length he reached a level tract, with a grassy surface, where numbers of goats were feeding. Before him was now spread a magnificent and imposing scene, an immense amphitheatre formed of mountains, whose snow-covered peaks seemed to support one vast canopy of azure.

The reflection of the sunlight on the glistening garb of everlasting winter was so powerful that it dazzled and hurt the eyes.

As he drew nearer and nearer towards the entrance, as it were, of that vast amphitheatre, he could perceive the desolating traces of destruction which, in various places, had been left by the landslip, the avalanche, or the torrent.

But how grand was nature in those mighty solitudes, whose silence was so seldom broken by human voices!

On, on went Pianalla; and soon he entered a rising path, which ran irregularly between the hills. Now also did the colossal features of the vast panorama grow out upon him—mountain and crag springing into existence—abysses yawning at his feet—occasional glimpses of laughing valleys appearing to him as he stood on some rocky pinnacle which commanded a view over the lesser eminences—and the gigantic ones in the distance gradually losing their light blue appearance, and standing out in distinct colours from the purple sky, but each with the eternal diadem of snow upon its spotless brow.

Otto had reached a point where the path suddenly turned the rugged angle of a rock, and stopped on the verge of a deep abyss. But on a close inspection of the locality the artist observed a flight of steps rudely cut, or rather notched, down a narrow sloping ledge, overhanging the chasm.

Convinced that those steps were fashioned by human hands, and, therefore, for some purpose, Otto determined to dare the perilous journey which they opened before him.

He endeavoured to follow the oblique ledge with his



eyes, in order to ascertain where it terminated, or to what it led; but it was lost beneath an overhanging mass of rock that jutted out from the wall or side of the chasm.

Otto's curiosity was piqued: he was, moreover, of a brave and enterprising disposition, and he did not hesitate to trust himself to that ledge of two feet wide, and which sloped at an angle of forty-five degrees.

Setting his back against this perpendicular wall, he proceeded sideways, the yawning abyss before him.

In this manner he advanced cautiously for nearly half an hour—not daring to plunge his looks into the chasm, for fear of becoming giddy and losing his balance.

At length he found himself beneath the overhanging mass of rock before alluded to.

Here the ledge became abruptly much wider, and led to a path which some convulsion of nature had formed between the two masses of a riven rock.

This path continued for upwards of a hundred yards, when it suddenly stopped at a wooden door, studded with large nails, and strengthened with iron bars.

Otto, who had hitherto kept his eyes fixed downwards, in order to pick his way over the broken, rough, and dangerous path, now looked upwards, and beheld the avenue closed by a lofty and gloomy wall, which stretched from one side of the riven rock to the other.

What there was beyond that wall he could not perceive, such was its height, and so peculiar was its position in respect to the rugged and inaccessible crags which it thus connected. Nevertheless, Otto could not entertain any other belief than that it was the outer wall of some stronghold, built upon a plan of defence common in those mountainous districts, where the works of nature might be so successfully combined with artificial means, in order to render a fortalice or tower totally impregnable to a besieging force.

While Otto was thus wrapt in conjecture relative to the precise object of the barrier which had thus suddenly stopped his way, a small trap, or *guichet*, in the huge door suddenly opened, and a man's voice exclaimed, "Stranger, whoever thou art, have pity upon me! Save me—save me from this dreadful dungeon, where I have languished for so long a period."

Otto glanced towards the *guichet*, but the moment his eyes caught sight of the countenance which gazed upon him, he uttered a cry of wild astonishment.

That countenance was well known to him!

But scarcely had the exclamation of surprise escaped his lips, when the face suddenly disappeared; a rough voice—not that of him who had addressed those suppliant words to Pianalla—uttered a terrible curse, and the *guichet* was closed violently.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### A SERIES OF MYSTERIOUS INCIDENTS.

PIANALLA remained rooted in astonishment to the spot, uncertain how to act, and marvelling at what he had seen.

"That countenance!" he murmured to himself. "Yes, it was the same, though paler and more melancholy." And yet he was at Vienna when I left that city on my present journey! True; but I have travelled at my leisure—slowly, and by easy stages. Nevertheless, did he not implore me to save him from a dungeon in which he had languished for a long period? Strange—passing strange! For even if he quitted Vienna on the same day as myself, even if he hastened with all imaginable speed to this neighbourhood, and was plunged into a dungeon on the moment of his arrival, he cannot have been a prisoner here for more than fifteen or twenty days. And yet he speaks of a long period! Alas! the sudden blow has turned his brain!"

Scarcely had Pianalla come to this conclusion, when the huge door grated upon its hinges, and forth rushed half-a-dozen men, all well-armed.

They instantly seized upon the young artist, blindfolded him, and raising him in their arms, carried him within the enclosure formed by the wall.

For a considerable time they proceeded on a level ground; but their footsteps echoed as if their way lay through a tunnel or sounding cavern.

Presently they ascended a spiral staircase, and, prompted by some sudden impulse, Pianalla counted seventy-seven steps—for the men had set him on his feet at the commencement of the flight, and compelled him to mount without their aid.

At the head of the staircase the party paused, and one of the men appeared, so far as Pianalla, who was still

blindfolded, could judge, to try a door. It did not, however, open, and the man said—

"We must wait a few minutes."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the rich sounds of an organ, apparently in an adjacent room or chapel, suddenly rolled through the building, seeming to fill the lofty arches with its power and grandeur.

The prelude—tasteful and elegant in melody, and chaste and rich in harmony—closed, and then the organ, pouring forth a richer and fuller volume, was accompanied by a choir, singing a sacred hymn.

So magnificent was the music, so impressive the vocal melody, that while it lasted Pianalla forgot the mysterious perils of his position—remembered not that he was blindfolded—thought not of the countenance which he had seen at the *guichet*.

But the moment the last solemn swell of the organ pealed through the building, with that crashing and yet gloriously harmonic sound which is peculiar to the noble instrument, Pianalla was awakened to a sense of his situation by a tap on the shoulder, and a rough voice in his ear, saying—

"We must now proceed farther."

At the same moment the door, before vainly tried, was unlocked from the other side, and the party, leading Pianalla, entered a place which he knew to be spacious by the time occupied in traversing it, and which he judged to be a chapel, by the invocations of a blessing which each one of his conductors murmured as they passed a particular spot—most probably, thought Pianalla, where the font containing the holy water stood.

This place, whether chapel or not, was passed through, and the party emerged into the open air. There could be no doubt that such was the fact, because the chill, cold Alpine blast, accompanied with a slight but cutting sleet, blew full in the face of Otto Pianalla.

The party crossed what appeared to the artist to be a large court, and then stopped at a gate, which one of the men endeavoured to open.

"The foul fiend seize the chatelain!" exclaimed this individual. "The gate is locked fast!"

"Hasten then for the keys, Karl," said another, "and we will await thy return."

"Karl will be ten minutes absent, and this sleet is enough to mark one as with the small-pox," observed a third.

"Let us remove yonder, comrades," said a fourth. "The place certainly is not very inviting; but, at all events, it is protected from this infernal weather."

"Well, I will rejoin you there," said Karl, as he departed to fetch the keys.

The party then moved abruptly to the right, ascended a few steps, on which the snow lay thick, and then halted. Otto knew that they were beneath a roof, as the sleet ceased to beat upon him; but the air was unvaried in its piercing and bitter chilliness.

"How many are there now?" said one of the men.

"Thirty-nine," was the answer given by a comrade; "another was added yesterday afternoon. Karl and I dug him out, close by the Zinzlin."

"Do you really believe, comrades," asked the first speaker, in a low and solemn tone, "that these poor creatures haunt the glaciers and show themselves to travellers?"

"There's no doubt of that, friends," replied another of the men. "They are often seen contemplating the spots where they were found; and sometimes they appear suddenly to inexperienced persons who dare the dangers of the mountains, and warn them of their peril."

"Holy Virgin protect us!" ejaculated the first speaker. "If I was to meet the spirit of one of these poor creatures, I should roll over the first precipice with fright."

"More fool you," said a gruff voice, which Otto had not heard before. "And fools you are, too, to talk of spirits and spectres, and matters you know nothing about."

"Fritz is a regular infidel in everything," cried one of the men.

"No more an infidel than you, good friend," said the same gruff voice; "but I have lived in these mountains sixty years, as boy and man, and there is not a cleft, or a crag, or a glacier, or a precipice, or a ledge, that I am strange to. I am familiar with them all; and though I've seen plenty of such objects as now surround you, I never yet met with one of the spirits or spectres that you are talking of. But here's Karl with the keys; let's go forward."

So intensely was Otto Pianalla's curiosity provoked by

the foregoing conversation, that he would have given worlds to have been able to raise the bandage from his eyes, and satisfy himself as to the nature of those objects which surrounded the party, and concerning which he already entertained suspicions that made his heart palpitate with horror. But if he attempted to raise his hand towards his countenance, a rude grasp instantly compelled him to desist.

The party moved on once more, passing through a gate which groaned upon its hinges, and was closed again behind them.

Then another court, as Pianalla conceived, was traversed, another door was opened, and they again entered some building, as the sleet ceased abruptly, and the air became in a trifling degree less piercing.

The party now ascended a wide staircase, and stopped at a door, which one of the men opened. Then Fritz, the one with a gruff voice, took Pianalla by the hand, and said—

"Come with me, young man. You, comrades, can obtain some refreshment; but be ready again in half an hour."

Then Fritz led Pianalla forward; the door closed behind them; and the sounds of the departing footsteps of the remainder of the party on the staircase grew fainter and fainter; a genial warmth rapidly imparted itself to the young artist's frame; the bandage was suddenly snatched from his eyes, and he found himself in a well-furnished apartment, with a blazing fire in the grate, and an inviting repast spread upon the table.

Near him stood Fritz, an old man with white hair, but a stern countenance, and dressed in a half mountaineer, half man-at-arms attire.

But even his rigid features relaxed into a sort of grim smile, as he marked the astonishment which was expressed on Pianalla's countenance.

"I dare say, young man," he exclaimed, in his gruff tone, "you think you have been brought to this comfortable place by some superhuman agency; but I can assure you that all is natural enough, if you could but understand it."

"I am here, in the midst of the Alpine snows," said Pianalla, glancing towards the table; "and yet I behold the flowers of Italy and the fruits of summer upon the board."

"Ah! it does seem strange," observed the old mountaineer, laconically. "But sit down and eat: the morning's ramble must have sharpened your appetite!"

With these words, Fritz seated himself at the table, and commenced a desperate attack upon the viands—an example which Pianalla, who now began to feel assured that no serious mischief was intended him, very readily followed.

Glancing round, to take a more accurate survey of the room, he observed that there were no windows in the perpendicular walls, but that the apartment was lighted by means of a large skylight, or rather lantern, in the roof. Thus the artist could not in any way ascertain to what kind of a building the room belonged.

"Young man," said Fritz, at length, laying down his knife and fork, "you cannot be a stranger in these mountains? Have you any idea where you are?"

"I am a perfect stranger in the Julian Alps," returned Otto. "I never set foot on their snow-paths until this morning; and I am in total ignorance of the place where I now find myself."

"Then how came you to venture along that path which overhangs the abyss, and which has even perils for the hardy and experienced mountaineer?" demanded Fritz, eyeing the artist suspiciously.

"I discovered that path by the merest accident," answered Otto, boldly, "and, being possessed of some curiosity—"

"And no little courage," added Fritz.

"Well—call it what you will," said Otto, slightly blushing at the ingenuous compliment. "In any case, I resolved to dare that strange path, because I am journeying for my amusement, and I was anxious to behold all the wonders of the Julian Alps. If I have done wrong by intruding in that quarter, I sincerely apologise; and I must now request you to restore me to freedom, by the same avenue, or any other that you please."

"You speak confidently and frankly, young man," said Fritz, "and I believe your assurance that you are a stranger in these parts. But I faith! you would make a fine mountaineer. In a few months, with a little practice, you would hunt the gamsen with the best of us! Let that idea, however, pass. I have one more question to

ask. Why did you utter an exclamation when you beheld that person ere now at the *guichet* in the great gate?"

"I recognised the countenance," answered Otto.

"You are, then, acquainted with that person?"

"No. I never exchanged a word with him in my life. But I have seen him often in Vienna, and thus know him well by sight."

The rigid features of old Fritz assumed a yet sterner expression, as Otto gave this explanation; and for some minutes he appeared to reflect profoundly.

"No harm shall happen to you, young man," he at length said; "but I cannot suffer you to depart hence, unless you will swear to observe the most implicit silence in respect to your recognition of that individual."

"How can I?" ejaculated Pianalla. "Did he not appeal to me to obtain his release from the dungeon in which he languishes? Is he not a fellow-creature, nay—more—a relative?"

"A relative!" ejaculated Fritz. "What is your name?"

"Otto Pianalla," was the reply.

"Ah," cried Fritz, "now I understand you!"

Then the old man rose and paced the room.

"Listen," he at length exclaimed, "I have a proposal to make to you; and, if you assent to it, your word is a sufficient guarantee that you will adhere to its conditions—for I know you to be a man of honour."

"Speak," said Otto.

"You shall be conveyed hence in a short time," proceeded Fritz; "and you shall promise to return to Vienna before you institute any further proceedings in consequence of your recognition of the person who spoke to you from the *guichet*. Then, if you find him restored to liberty, and in the full enjoyment of freedom—not here—but in the German capital, you will consider yourself bound by a solemn vow never to allude to his temporary imprisonment here."

"I will promise nothing," said Pianalla, without a moment's hesitation. "If he obtain his liberty, it is for him to adopt proceedings to punish those who have unjustly detained him here—if unjustly detained he be. When I see him restored to freedom, I have no more need to trouble myself with him or his concerns. But until I do see him thus emancipated, I will not bind myself to remain passive in the matter. At the same time, as you treat me now, so shall I be induced to shape my future intentions."

"Nobly said!" ejaculated Fritz. "Let us pledge each other in a bumper of this good wine."

Fritz poured out the rich red juice into two cups; he and the artist then drank in ratification of the sort of compact entered into between them.

But scarcely had Otto replaced the cup upon the table, when he fell back in his chair, wrapped in a profound lethargy.

When he awoke the sun was shining gloriously in the heavens; and the climate in which he found himself was warm and genial.

He was lying in a meadow, the verdant carpet of which was spangled with myriads of flowers.

By the height of the sun, it appeared to be mid-day.

Otto rose, and speedily called to mind all the events—events of so strange and mysterious a nature—which had so recently occurred to him.

But where was he now?

There were the Julian Alps in the distance; and yet—when he studied the position of the sun—those mountains appeared to be to the northward, whereas were he still in Carniola, they should stand in the south.

Moreover, those green meadows, those placid rills, those cottages shaded by the verdant foliage of beautiful trees, those gardens in the distance. Oh! all this was not the cold and comfortless Carniola.

Then, where was he? Had he awoke from a long and wondrous dream? Or was he the victim of some superhuman agency?

It was not a dream—for all the incidents ere now related were too vividly impressed upon his mind to have been the mere phantoms of his imagination.

While he was thus lost in conjecture, he beheld a peasant approaching. But as the man drew near, Otto saw by his complexion and peculiar dress, that he was not one of the hardy serfs of Carniola.

"Where am I, worthy friend?" asked Pianalla, forgetting, in the bewildered condition of his brain, that the question was a strange one.

And, indeed, so it appeared to the peasant, who, eyeing the young man with some surprise, replied in Italian, "You are in Farmer Benvenuto's field; and I am Farmer Benvenuto, at your service."

"But the country—what territory—what state is this?" demanded Otto, also speaking in Italian, with which language he was familiar.

"What state? what country?" repeated the farmer, stepping back a pace or two, in evident apprehension of the condition of his interlocutor's brain; "why—in Italy, to be sure! Where do you suppose yourself to be? Poor young man—poor young man."

And the farmer hurried away as rapidly as he could, leaving Pianalla overwhelmed with the most painful astonishment.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### THE ITALIAN PEASANT.

OTTO now sat down in the flowery meadow, and pondered upon all that had passed.

He traced every incident minutely up to the instant when he drank the cup of wine which Fritz had handed to him; but he was at a total loss to conjecture how long a period had elapsed since that particular moment.

He did not feel very hungry; and therefore he began to conclude that his adventures in the Julian Alps must have occurred on the preceding day.

He examined his pockets; his money and papers were all safe, he had not been plundered of a single thing.

Having thus composed his mind to a certain degree, he rose and advanced towards a cottage which he observed in the distance, and which was nearer the foot of the mountains than the one towards which the churlish farmer had bent his way.

Arrived at the door of the hut, he found a pretty Italian peasant girl seated at an open window, employed with her spinning wheel. His request to be permitted to rest himself was cheerfully complied with; the girl invited him into the cottage, and set before him a copious but homely repast.

While he ate, he gradually led the fair peasant into conversation, and by means of one or two artful questions, so as not to astonish her by the strangeness of such queries as had excited the wonder and suspicions of Farmer Benvenuto, he ascertained the date of the month. His original conjecture was right: it was indeed the very day after that on which occurred the singular incidents previously related.

"How long will it take me to cross the mountains into Carniola?" he inquired, after a pause.

"Three days, signor," was the answer. "It is not that the distance is very great," added the peasant girl, "but you must follow so many circuitous turns and windings that the journey is long and tedious."

"Three days!" ejaculated Pianalla; but he checked himself abruptly, not daring to say that he had certainly passed from Carniola into Italy in one day. "Are you certain that there is no short cut—no means of performing the journey in less time than you mention?"

"I have lived since my birth in this cottage, signor," rejoined the girl, "and I never heard of any other way than the one I alluded to. My father will return home to his dinner shortly, and he can give you more information on the subject than I."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when a sturdy peasant, of middle age, entered the room.

"Here is my father, signor," said the girl. "He will be delighted to explain to you all he knows in reference to the mountains."

"Yes, that will I right gladly, signor," exclaimed the peasant.

Otto then repeated the queries which he had put to the man's daughter.

For a moment a species of cloud came over the brow of the peasant, and fixing his keen dark eyes upon the artist, he said—

"Have you a particular motive, signor, for thus questioning me, or is it simply as a traveller, who is anxious to abridge his journey as much as possible, that you seek information?"

"I will be candid with you," answered Pianalla, who fancied that there was something peculiar in the peasant's manner. "The truth is precisely this: Yesterday morning I was in Carniola. I set out at an early hour to explore the mountains, and after rambling amongst those snow-covered heights for about two hours, I came to a dangerous path, where human ingenuity had, to some extent, mitigated the rude difficulties formed by nature. This path led to a narrow valley or defile, at the extremity of which was a high wall. A door in that wall opened, and several men, well-armed, came forth. They seized

me, blindfolded me, and conducted me through several rooms and courtyards, until at length the bandage was removed from my eyes. I then found myself in a handsome apartment, and in the company of an old man, whom I had heard called by the name of Fritz. A conversation took place between us, the details of which would be uninteresting to you. I drank a cup of wine, and almost immediately afterwards became insensible. When I awoke, an hour ago, I was in Italy, lying in yonder meadows."

Otto ceased, and anxiously awaited the peasant's reply; but this was not immediately given. The man leant his head upon his hand, and appeared to reflect profoundly.

"My narrative strikes you to be too ridiculous to be true," said Pianalla; "and yet I can assure you that I am as sane at this moment as ever I was in my life, and that I have not the slightest motive to deceive you."

"I not only believe every word you have uttered, signor," returned the peasant, at length, as he raised his head, and looked the young artist fixedly in the face, "but I know that you have spoken the truth."

"You know it!" ejaculated Pianalla, greatly surprised by this assurance.

"Yes, signor, I know it," repeated the man, "for I myself have travelled precisely the same road as the one which you have described."

"You, father!" cried the girl, with unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, Nina, dear," answered the man; "but I never breathed a word of that mysterious business to living mortal until now. My secrecy was imposed upon me by the most terrible threats of vengeance. I will, however, relate all that occurred on the occasion to which I allude."

Nina drew her chair closer to her father, and Otto Pianalla became all attention and curiosity.

"It was about six years ago, Nina, you remember, when I was called into Carniola by the death of your poor mother," began the peasant. "My wife, signor," he continued, addressing himself to Otto, "had gone to visit a relation who had settled in the German territory, and there she was seized with a grievous malady. I reached our relation's abode only just in time to close her eyes. After the funeral, I set out alone on my way homeward, for I knew that my pretty Nina here would be alarmed if my absence was prolonged further. It was a beautiful morning when I began my journey; but my heart was heavy with the loss I had sustained, and, thinking on this and other matters, I forgot the directions I had received, and missed my way. At length, I fell into a path which suddenly stopped on the edge of a wide, yawning chasm. Wondering why a road, which had evidently been cleared by mortal hands, should thus lead to nothing, as it were, I examined the surrounding parts well, and at length discovered that very sloping, narrow ledge which you, signor, have described. I have been accustomed all my life to ramble amongst the mountains on the Italian side, and it was not, therefore, very probable that I should be daunted by the perilous nature of the path thus opened to my view. I proceeded along, or rather down, the almost precipitate ledge, passed under a huge overhanging crag, and reached the defile you have mentioned. I soon came to the wall from one perpendicular rock to another; and while I was deliberating what to do—whether to seek admittance or retrace my steps—a small trap in the great door opened, and a pale but handsome countenance appeared."

"Ah!" ejaculated Pianalla.

"At the same moment," continued the peasant, "an imploring voice exclaimed, 'Whoever you are, kind stranger, I beseech you, in the name of heaven, to take some measures to save me from this dreadful place! Repair to Laybach, and tell the governor that the Baron of Czernin—'"

"The Baron of Czernin!" cried Otto. "And this adventure happened to you six years ago?"

"Six years ago," repeated the peasant, calmly; "I cannot be mistaken."

"Proceed," said Otto; "but this is most strange—most wonderful!"

"Scarcely had the prisoner—for such I, of course, conceived him to be—uttered those words," continued the peasant, "when he was forcibly dragged away from the trap; the large door opened, and several men, well armed, as you describe them, signor, rushed out. I was immediately bound, blindfolded, and led into the building—for a building I am convinced it was, by the echo of the

footsteps beneath the arches. I was conducted through several courts, until the party stopped in a well-furnished room, with no windows at the sides——"

"But with a skylight in the roof?" cried Pianalla. "It was the same to which I ere now alluded."

"The bandage was not, however, immediately taken from my eyes," proceeded the peasant, "as it was from yours. On the contrary, the men began to debate what they should do with me. Some proposed to put me to death, declaring 'that dead men told no tales'; others thought it would be best to keep me prisoner for life; but old Fritz—of whom you have spoken—pleaded for me, and as he appeared to enjoy some authority with the band, his opinion prevailed. The bandage was then removed from my eyes, and food was offered to me. I was, however, too ill at ease either to eat or drink. The dreadful deliberation in which my death had been calmly proposed and discussed, had filled me with horror. Then Fritz addressed me, saying that I should be conveyed out of the building; but he assured me that if ever I dared to breathe a word of what I had seen or heard vengeance should overtake me. 'You know not in whose power you now are,' said Fritz, 'but rest convinced that the most terrible fate will overtake you if you attempt to betray us; wherever you may be, even surrounded by an army, you shall die, so surely as you disregard my injunctions!' Then some of his followers compelled me to swallow a cup of wine. I became insensible, and when I awoke next day, about noon, I was within a hundred yards of my own cottage."

"Our adventures are nearly parallel," said Otto, profoundly surprised at this narrative; "but I must tell you that I also saw the *guichet* open in the door belonging to the barrier wall; I also beheld a pale and handsome countenance at the aperture, and I also was invoked by that same individual to save him. The most extraordinary portion of the whole mystery is, however, yet to be revealed to you. In that unfortunate prisoner I recognised the Baron of Czernin."

"Then he has remained a prisoner ever since I saw him at the trap-door," observed the peasant.

"No," answered Otto, "he has been living for some years at Vienna. In a word, he is the husband of my only sister."

"Unfortunate man, thus to fall a second time into the hands of his enemies!" exclaimed the peasant.

"Unfortunate, indeed," said Otto. "But how could he have been mad enough to venture again into a neighbourhood where he had been deprived of his freedom on a previous occasion? And, again, why did he adopt no steps to punish his persecutors, when he recovered his liberty on that first occasion?"

"There is certainly a strange mystery in all this, signor," said the peasant. "But perhaps those terrible menaces, which have hitherto sealed my lips——"

"Oh! no—the Baron is not a man to be thus intimidated," interrupted Otto. "Besides, when he returned to Vienna, he claimed and recovered an immense fortune; and a man of his rank and wealth could have obtained the aid of an army to punish those brigands of the Julian Alps, who had dared to detain him in their stronghold. For the Baron had been absent for twelve or thirteen years, I have been told; and nothing save a close confinement could have prevented him from returning earlier to his native city, to attend to his affairs. Then, again, the Baron alleged that he had been a prisoner in Turkey, and never—so far as I have heard—alluded to his incarceration in the Alps. I mention all these particulars, to show you that I am inclined to reciprocate the confidence which you have placed in me. There is, however, one fact which is evident:—the Baron of Czernin is a prisoner in that Alpine fortress! He is my brother-in-law; and, although I dislike his character, and, strange to say, am totally unknown to him, save by name, I feel it to be my duty to exert myself in obtaining his deliverance."

"You will find the task a difficult one, signor," said the peasant, shaking his head. "A single cannon planted on the top of that barrier-wall would sweep an entire army from the defile."

"But there must be another avenue of communication with the stronghold," said Otto, emphatically. "Wherefore that precaution of rendering both yourself and me insensible to what passed around, by means of a soporific, unless it were to conceal that avenue through which we were respectively conveyed into Italy? And how could a journey of two or three days be thus strangely abridged, save by some unseen communication with this side of the Alps?"

"I have entertained the same suspicion, signor, ever

since the adventure happened to myself," said the peasant.

"And can such a mystery remain impervious to you, who are so well acquainted with the neighbouring mountains?" asked Otto.

"Signor," answered the peasant, "those dreadful menaces which preceded my strange release from the stronghold have hitherto checked any feeling of curiosity which I may have at times entertained in that respect. Moreover, I know that the business was none of mine own; and my avocations leave me but little leisure to trouble myself about the affairs of others. If anything happened to me, who would protect my pretty Nina?"

"Listen," said Otto, after a long pause, during which he reflected on the proper means to adopt in the present case; "I am resolved to devote myself to the elucidation of this mystery. I agree with you, that the idea of obtaining the succour of an army to besiege a place so well defended by nature is absurd. The only prudent plan of operations is to discover the secret means of communication which exist between Italy and that stronghold. Will you aid me in this enterprise? There can be no risk in that; and I will amply compensate the loss of time which you may incur."

"I cannot refuse you the succour of my experience of the mountains," answered the peasant; "but I do not bind myself to co-operate with you in any scheme of a hostile nature against the stronghold, should we discover the avenue which connects it with the Italian frontier."

"On these conditions let our agreement stand for the present," said Otto. "With your leave, I will take up my abode here until I either succeed in my object, or become convinced of the futility of my present hopes."

"My cottage shall be your home, signor, so long as such a humble residence may be agreeable. My name is Mazzini—and that name has never yet been associated with the word 'inhospitality.' Repose yourself for to-day; to-morrow morning at sunrise we will commence our search amongst the mountains."

Mazzini now desired Nina to serve up his dinner; and, as the girl bustled about to spread the table, Otto could not help observing that she possessed a very neat figure and a well-turned ankle.

He had before noticed that her face was of the most pleasing character—her eyes large and dark, her mouth small, and embellished with teeth white as ivory—and her complexion clear, but deeply brunette.

As he grew more friendly with her in the course of the afternoon, he found that she was sprightly, good-tempered, and agreeable in her manners; and as he himself was remarkably handsome, they speedily began to feel that they were not displeasing to each other.

A comfortable chamber was allotted to Pianalla; and he slept tranquilly beneath the roof of the Italian peasant.

An hour before sunrise he rose, refreshed, and prepared for the day's ramble amongst the mountains.

Nina presided at a most hospitable board; and when the morning meal was over Mazzini signified his readiness to accompany Otto on the projected excursion.

Nina desired him, with an arch smile, to take care of her father. Mazzini embraced his daughter tenderly; and he and Otto then set forth towards the Julian Alps.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### ADVENTURES IN THE JULIAN ALPS.

THE blue mists of morning floated in light vapours over the wild but magnificent region upon which Mazzini and the young artist now entered; but the summits of the highest mountains were enveloped in darker and heavier clouds.

The acclivities to a considerable distance—unlike the base of the chain on the Carnioan side—were covered with verdure; and some of the lesser mountains were clothed to the very summits with deep dark forests, broken only by rugged rocks. Here and there, groves of charming evergreens, flourishing in all the wild luxuriance of soil and climate, relieved the more sombre hues of those wood-crowned hills.

The ascent of the mountains was very gradual at first; but the declivities were much broken; and in many places the overhanging shrubs concealed chasms of a great depth.

Having gained a lofty eminence, Otto requested his companion to pause for a few moments while he surveyed the Italian scenery which they had left behind them.

Turning his eyes towards the south, he was struck with delight at the boldness, the romantic grandeur, and the

wild luxuriance of the country which now lay extended beneath his feet; while on the right the hills seemed to retire in ranges of softening purple until they melted away in the brighter tints of the horizon.

The scene was, beyond all description, beautiful, beneath the splendour of an Italian sunshine!

And now the presence of the orb of day dispelled the black clouds which had hitherto hung on the highest peaks of the mountains; and those towering summits formed a majestic background to the panoramic scene,—rising upon the sky precisely at that distance in which all hues are lost in those aerial tints that soften the too rugged character, without injuring the picturesque outline of that noble chain.

"It cannot be near the base of the mountains that we shall find the entrance to any secret avenue, path, or outlet in connection with the stronghold," observed Mazzini to Otto, as they turned to continue their way. "We must seek the most wild and desolate, as well as the most dangerous spots; for those who took such care to render one means of approach to their abode so perilous as both you and I found that shelving Carniolan path to be, would not neglect a like precaution on the Italian side."

"True," said Otto; "and there is one fact that may probably serve as a clue to the object of our search."

"Which is that?" demanded the peasant.

"When you awoke on the morning after your adventure in the Alpine stronghold, you were lying in a field, a hundred yards from your cottage," remarked Otto; "and when I awoke yesterday at noon, I found myself in a meadow, at about the same distance, and, as we have ascertained by comparing notes, in the same direction. Supposing that the individuals who conveyed us thither, on those respective occasions, would choose the shortest path from their own private outlet in the mountains, to the fields where they deposited us, we should commence our search amongst the wilds which lie nearest to those meadows."

"The same idea has guided me in choosing our path hitherto," said Mazzini. "Let us ascend yonder eminence; the region immediately beyond will require the most careful examination."

They now proceeded between four and five miles higher up the mountains, and at length entered a narrow gorge, bounded by overhanging rocks and tremendous precipices.

The aspect of the scene was now savage, forbidding, and awe-inspiring.

A cold and cutting wind suddenly blew in the faces of the travellers as they entered the desolate gorge; and the rush of a mighty torrent, pouring down its rocky bed far beneath them, raised ten thousand echoes with its wild uproar.

The further they proceeded, the more severely blew the wind from the snowy mountains, piercing, like arrows of ice, into the very marrow of their bones. Thus, in three short hours, they found themselves, as it were, in another zone.

The gorge ran level for about a quarter of a mile, and then assumed a long ascent amongst enormous rocks shagged with pine, until it stopped abruptly on the verge of a fearful precipice, down which a tremendous torrent rushed headlong with deafening din.

Here were some of the grandest and most striking features of the Alpine scenery. On the opposite side of the yawning and rugged gulf huge rocks seemed piled one above another, stretching almost as far as the eye could reach, until they became commingled with the snowy mountains, which towered into the sky like clouds. On the right and left, rugged and inaccessible crags apparently barred all progress in those directions: and over the abyss, down which the cascade thundered, the pines waved and the stunted shrubs hung like a fringe. Here and there, on some soil less sterile than the rest, grew quantities of a species of rhododendron, popularly called the Rose of the Alps.

"It strikes me that there are some means of reaching the opposite side of this chasm," said Mazzini, after he had attentively examined the locality. "The bushes and shrubs have been cleared away in this place," he added, pointing to a particular spot, "by some human hand,—and consequently for some purpose. See! here are the stumps of their roots peeping above the soil."

Mazzini, with the experience of one to whom the mountains were familiar, now commenced a careful examination of the locality, in which task he was aided by the artist.

Suddenly an exclamation of joy escaped Mazzini's lips.

Otto hastened towards him, and observed through a

knot of pine-trees the narrow entrance of a cavern in the inaccessible wall of crags stretching on the right of the gorge.

"Behold a secret path,—or I am much mistaken,—signor," exclaimed the peasant. "And, mark—the shrubs have been cut away so as to form a species of avenue to this very group of pines which protects the entrance of the cavern. It is now past mid-day; the clouds are gathering over-head,—and the brightness of the morning will soon be obscured by the dense mists that usher in the tourmental. Think you not that we have done enough for to-day?"

"What is the tourmental that you appear to dread?" inquired Otto.

"The snow-storm," answered Mazzini. "In a single hour after it has commenced, this gorge, which has not now a particle of snow upon its soil, will be many feet deep with the drifts from yonder mountains."

"Let us at all events ascertain whether this cavern be really the outlet of some path or not," said Otto: "a very short time will clear up all uncertainty in that respect."

Mazzini offered no objection; but, passing between the pines, he entered the cave, closely followed by the young artist.

For nearly a hundred paces the sub-montane excavation continued narrow and low—not a yard in width, and scarcely four feet in height; but when that distance was passed, the cavern increased in dimensions until it terminated on the brink of a precipice, but along which ran a ledge nearly four feet wide.

From the mouth of the cavern at the group of pines to that which opened upon the ledge overhanging the chasm, the distance was about two hundred yards; and that excavation was evidently the work of Nature.

And in those Alpine regions what terrific implements does Nature employ to effect her grand purposes! The raging torrent, which undermines the granite rocks, and hollows for itself a tunnel through the hardest crags,—the earthquake, which splits mountains asunder and forms valleys in an instant,—the lightning, which levels the loftiest pines,—and the avalanche, which fills up chasms once impassable,—these are the tools that Nature wields for her mighty handiwork.

"Shall we proceed farther now?" demanded Mazzini, who thought of his daughter as he glanced upward to the lowering sky:—at the same time his pride prevented him from betraying the full extent of his anxiety to return homewards.

"It is past mid-day, you said ere now," observed Otto; "but that is still early. Surely we might explore a little farther! Remember how much time we shall lose to-morrow merely in retracing our steps from your cottage to this spot."

Mazzini again waived his objections, and entering boldly upon the ledge, led the way along the brink of the precipice in whose depths the waters boiled and foamed with terrific uproar.

They proceeded without interruption for upwards of half an hour, when the chasm was passed, and the ledge joined a path running through a defile or gorge which wound its circuitous way between the mountains that now towered to a tremendous height above.

But scarcely had the travellers reached this point when a peal of thunder burst over them, reverberating awfully amidst the rocks, and re-echoing in lengthened bursts, as if a thousand cannon suddenly exploded in those Alpine solitudes.

The sky grew rapidly dark, as if it were evening; and the lightning played with strange vividness on the steep sides of the adjacent mountains, which gleamed white with the snows of thousands of winters.

Now, too, the cold became so piercing that a few drops of blood fell from the artist's nose; and his extremities felt benumbed. His companion, more accustomed to the atmosphere of the mountains, did not experience the inconveniences of that piercing chill to the same extent.

"The tourmental!" ejaculated Mazzini. "We cannot retrace our steps, or we shall be blown off the ledge into the chasm; and we dare not remain still, or we shall be frozen to death. We must push onwards—happen what will!"

And they continued their way.

The wind now swept through the defile with appalling violence,—assailing the travellers with a fury that nearly carried them off their feet, and accompanied with a piercing, icy chill which almost deprived them of the power of motion. At the same time the snow fell in immense flakes, and the blast swept the drifts from the mountains in such



sleet-like clouds that they were enveloped as it were by a dark and impenetrable mist.

Ever and anon the ruthless wind whirled the snow around the peasant and the artist in circling eddies, and with a fearful impetuosity.

The mountains on either side were shrouded in the desolating storm;—the howling of the wind, the sweeping noise of the falling sleet, the roar of the thunder, and the din of the neighbouring torrents, formed a chorus of all the dread voices in which nature speaks in the Alpine regions.

Sinking up to their knees at every step—blinded with the snow—stunned with the din of the clashing elements—numbed with the bitter, piercing cold—afraid to proceed, dreading still more to turn back, and not daring to stand still, Mazzini and Otto Pianalla toiled miserably along—the former thinking of his daughter, the latter regretting that he had not followed his companion's hint to return homewards ere the tourmental began.

In this manner an hour and a half passed away.

Suddenly as it came on, so rapidly did the storm begin to subside; the snow soon ceased to fall—the wind lulled—the darkness dispersed—and the thunder ceased to roar. In twenty minutes more the tempest had yielded to a delicious calm; but still the clouds hung in magnificent masses overhead, displaying, as they drew up, the peaked and snow-clad summits which surrounded the travellers.

"Shall we now return?" said Otto, willing to save his companion's ~~trouble~~ by being the first to propose a retrograde movement.

"It is useless to attempt to retrace our steps at present," answered Mazzini. "The ledge along which we were now passed, is so exposed that the snowdrifts must completely bar the way. We have no alternative but to proceed."

"What will your charming daughter think of your absence?" asked Otto.

"By the Virgin! the poor girl must pass a night of suspense," replied the peasant. "Fortunately, I implored her not to make herself uneasy if we did not happen to return; and she is well aware of my experience in the mountains. We need not be uneasy on account of ourselves," he continued; "for here is an Alpine finger-post, which indicates an asylum close at hand."

"Where is your finger-post?" asked Otto, glancing anxiously around him.

Mazzini pointed to a small niche hollowed in the trunk of a blasted oak-tree, and in which there was a rudely-carved figure of the Madonna holding a still more wretchedly modelled image of the Saviour in her arms.

Then, with one accord, the two travellers prostrated themselves before the sacred shrine, and prayed silently, but with fervour, for a happy issue to their present undertaking.

Having finished their pious duty, they rose and pursued their way.

The infidel may deride as he will,—the scoffer may ridicule the opinion;—but it is nevertheless a grand and solemn truth, that an act of devotion in the hour of danger inspires the soul with confidence and with courage,—invoking Providence, as it does, to watch over the path of peril, and raising up a belief that He will indeed vouchsafe to become a guide in the ways of difficulty! But how impressive, and yet how cheering, is that worship which calls upon the Deity from the midst of those Alpine wilds through which He has lately spoken in the voices of the storm! Then is the religion of the believer influenced by the power of the majestic spectacle before his eyes; and as he ponders on the prayer that he has put up, he feels as if it were already answered,—while a chord thrills within his heart, and a voice sings in his soul, teaching him that that chord and that voice were never before wanting, but only asleep! For the wings of religion, like those of the eagles, have need of solitude and immensity for their play!

"You say that there is an asylum near?" exclaimed Otto, after a long pause, during which they had proceeded along the defile, each occupied with his own solemn reflections—the result of their prayers: "but if it belong to those who have studied to keep this avenue as a secret way for their own wicked or mysterious purposes, shall we not be running headlong into danger?"

"We must risk it," answered the peasant. "In the first place, we are by no means certain that this is actually the path communicating with the stronghold; and, secondly, even if it be, that place must be still very far off. We cannot pass the night in the mountains: we must accept the first shelter that presents itself in our way."

"Let us push on, then," said Otto.

In a quarter of an hour they reached the end of the defile, and found themselves at the door of a hut which they did not perceive until they were close up to it, so deeply buried was it in the snow-drifts.

From that spot two paths branched off. The one to the left was wide and easy; and a finger-post pointed in that direction. The one to the right was narrow, broken, and overhung by frowning crags.

The same idea struck Otto and Mazzini at the same moment, as appeared by the significant glances which they exchanged, and which were as much as to say, "If either of those paths leads to the stronghold, it is the one on the right hand, because pains have been taken to smooth the other, to which moreover a finger-post formally points."

Mazzini knocked at the cottage: no one answered the summons; and he accordingly pushed open the door.

The hut was divided into two compartments; no living soul was inside either; but there was a good store of dry wood piled near the chimney; and several cooking materials stood upon a shelf.

"Luckily I supplied my wallet with provisions," observed Mazzini.

A fire was speedily kindled: the contents of the wallet were spread on a rude table that there was in the hut; and, seated on stools near the blazing hearth, the two travellers made a comfortable meal.

They determined to remain in their present quarters for the night, and to rise very early in order to prosecute their exploring expedition.

The sun went down; but the darkness in that region was not intense; for the stars shone brightly, and their pale lustre was reflected and enhanced by the gleaming snow.

The two inmates of the hut were about to dispose themselves to rest in the most comfortable manner they could contrive, when they were startled by the sounds of voices outside; and immediately afterwards loud knocks resounded at the door, which they had fastened on their entrance.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE COTTAGE IN THE ALPS.

OTTO PIANALLA and Mazzini hastened to the door; and the moment it was opened, two men, sustaining between them a female closely muffled in shawls of the handsomest description, entered the hut.

Otto placed a stool close to the fire, and conducted the lady to it, while Mazzini heaped fresh wood upon the hearth.

"Let us now look after the mules," said one of the lady's attendants—both of whom were sturdy mountaineers belonging to the Carniolan side of the Julian Alps. "There is a shed at a little distance, if I remember aright, but it's a long while since I was in this part of the hills."

They went out together; and the lady, who was cheered with the genial warmth of the fire, proceeded to divest herself of the shawls which were twisted round her head and neck in such a manner that only a small part of her countenance had hitherto been visible. When these invidious coverings were withdrawn, a charming face was disclosed:—in a word, description is unnecessary—for the beautiful traveller was none other than Irene Notaras.

"Accept my thanks, courteous strangers," she said, addressing herself in German to Mazzini and Pianalla, "for your attentions towards me. Had it not been, moreover, for the care which those excellent mountaineers took of me, during that terrific storm, I should have perished in these dismal wilds; for I am a native of a far-off clime, where a temperature like this is unknown."

"I should imagine, lady," said Mazzini, who understood German, "that your guides must have lost their way; for if you are journeying from Carniola into Italy, you have deviated considerably from the usual track."

"Yes,—my own faithful dependents both fell ill and died in Vienna; and I am now on my way from the ungenial atmosphere of Germany to that of Italy," answered the lady, "where I hope soon to embark for my native Syria."

"You speak the German language well, lady, for one who is not a daughter of the clime," observed Otto.

"I was taught to speak German by one who had pleasure in instructing me, and with whom I was a willing pupil," replied Irene, mournfully. "But, alas! I shall

never see him more! A strange and terrible mystery envelopes all that concerns him!"

The tears started into her eyes as she uttered these words: and almost at the same moment the two mountaineers entered the hut.

"We have found the shed, and made the mules as comfortable as they can be," said one. "How feel you now, lady?"

"The warmth of the fire has invigorated me," answered Irene. "Shall we be enabled to proceed towards Italy at day-break?"

"The Holy Virgin willing, lady," was the reply, "you shall set foot on the Italian frontier to-morrow evening. But, as near as I can guess, we have deviated some eight or ten miles out of the right path."

"And when you recover the proper road to-morrow morning," said Mazzini, "will it take you unto sunset to reach Italy, with your good mules?"

"I faith that it will!" exclaimed the mountaineer.

"I can assure you that we set foot in the hills this morning at sunrise, and long before sunset we reached this hut," said Mazzini. "We were on foot, and experienced many hindrances in choosing our way."

"There is a rumour amongst some of the oldest mountaineers on the Carniolan side," returned the man who had previously spoken, "that some short cut exists between the two frontiers, whereby the journey may be effected in half the time that it occupies by the regular road; but I never met anyone who could give positive information on the point."

"Then I firmly believe that myself and companion have discovered a clue to the short cut you mention," said Mazzini; "and, if I am not mistaken, we have already arrived hither by a portion of that way, and shall continue it to-morrow morning by means of the path which branches off hence to the right."

"I should opine, good friend," observed the mountaineer, "that the short path which has brought you thus far from Italy would suit us in pursuing our journey to-morrow."

"No," answered Otto. "Your mules could not traverse that path; and the lady herself would shrink from the danger of the yawning precipices."

"In that case, we will retrace our steps to the beaten road," said the mountaineer; "and I thank you, young friend, for the information all the same. Maybe, when I have a leisure day, I may try to discover the short path you speak of; as it will perhaps serve me when I have to guide foot passengers over the mountains."

"We will cheerfully give you all the suggestions within our knowledge, to enable you to find the short path of which we are speaking," observed Otto; "but I should advise you to act with caution, for I fear this road, so little known, is fraught with danger."

"You need not be afraid, young man, that I shall trespass on your grounds," cried the mountaineer, in a surly tone.

"By heaven, you wrong me!" ejaculated Otto. "Neither I nor my companion earn our livelihood by conducting travellers amidst the Alps; and therefore no selfish motive prompted me to give you the advice which I proffered. No; far from wishing to exclude you from a knowledge of the secret path which we believe ourselves to have discovered, we would gladly obtain a reinforcement in our expedition."

"Forgive my warmth," said the mountaineer; "I misunderstood you. Now I perceive that you are frank and honest, as I love men to be with each other. But what, in the name of the Virgin! can induce you to thrust yourself into the danger you speak of?"

"A duty—a paramount duty towards a relative, whom I know to be immured in some strong place amidst the mountains, and within a few miles of the Carniolan frontier," replied Otto.

"I know of no strong place near here except the Capuchins' Convent," said the mountaineer; "and that certainly was once a castle."

Otto immediately remembered the sounds of the organ, and the accompanying hymn which he had heard when in the "stronghold," as he always called the building where he had seen the Baron of Czernin a prisoner.

"Is the entrance to that convent difficult of access?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

Mazzini understood the purport of the question, and on his part anxiously awaited the reply.

"A winding path, wide enough for two mules to go abreast, leads to the gate of the convent from the road which travellers generally pursue in passing from Carniola into Italy over the Julian Alps," said the moun-

taineer. "Many years ago the convent was noted for its hospitality; but it gradually fell off in that respect; and for a long time now, no one ever seeks shelter there, unless actually compelled. For my part, I am at a loss to imagine how the monks obtain the means of existence; for they have no lands—no flocks—no revenues; and since they have ceased to be hospitable, they obtain no gratuities from strangers."

"Do the inmates of that convent bear a good character in the mountains, in other respects?" asked Otto, with a significant and rapid glance towards Mazzini.

"If you mean whether they leave travellers unmolested and mind their own business, I can safely answer that they do," said the mountaineer; "for all their anxiety appears to be left entirely to themselves."

"My good friend," exclaimed Otto, "every word you have just uttered induces me to believe that the danger of which I spoke ere now, in respect to the short path between Italy and Carniola, lies in that very convent."

"Such is now my opinion also," said Mazzini.

"How so?" inquired the mountaineer.

"We will not be churlish in reference to the nature of our business," continued Otto Pianalla; "nor withhold a confidence which your own frankness deserves at our hands. Our narratives are, however, too long to relate at present: it will be sufficient to observe that we have every reason to believe there is a German nobleman of rank confined most unjustly in that convent. In a word, it was but the day before yesterday that I myself beheld the Baron of Czernin—"

"The Baron of Czernin!" ejaculated Irene. "Speak, Sir Stranger—did you say the Baron of Czernin?"

"Yes, lady," replied Otto, surprised at the excitement with which the beautiful Greek lady addressed him. "The Baron of Czernin is a prisoner in that convent!"

"Are there two noblemen of that name?" asked Irene, impatiently.

"Not that I am aware of," replied Otto. "Indeed, I believe I may confidently assure you that there are not. But this question, lady, is most strange. Wherefore did you put it? Answer me, I implore you;—for I also have wondered within myself whether there could be two Barons of Czernin—and those either brothers, or bearing a close resemblance to each other?"

"I put that question to you, sir," exclaimed Irene, "because my first and only love was given to Theodore von Czernin, many years ago; and he strangely disappeared from Damascus almost at the moment when our hands were to be united. Years passed, and I learnt that he was at Vienna. I proceeded to that city; and two months ago I saw the individual who now bears the name and enjoys the rank and fortune of the Baron of Czernin. But, oh! sir—the fond heart of a woman, who loves as I have loved, and still love, cannot be deceived. He who is styled the Baron of Czernin, in Vienna, is not the noble, generous-hearted, handsome Theodore to whom I plighted my troth! No—years have passed, as I ere now said; and though time may have dimmed the eyes, silvered the hair, and traced wrinkles on the brow of that Theodore whom I loved and love,—though his voice may be changed, his proud form bowed, his cheeks furrowed, and his lofty bearing subdued,—aye—though even his mind be strained, polluted, tarnished with dissipation, vice, or even crime—Oh! I should yet know him,—I should single him,—the adored one,—out from ten thousand others, were all the rest as like to him at the first glance as that Baron whom I saw at Vienna!"

"Merciful heavens, lady!" cried Otto; "you have aroused strange suspicions in my mind! The prisoner in the stronghold of these mountains was seen six years ago by my companion here," pointing to Mazzini; "and when he implored me the other morning to aid him in recovering his liberty, he spoke of a long captivity! Tell me, lady, at length, all you know of your Theodore von Czernin; for the one whom you saw at Vienna is my brother-in-law,—the husband of my sister Ida!"

"Our meeting thus in the midst of these Alpine wilds, sir," said Irene, "is probably something more than a mere accident. You were on your way to rescue one whom you believed to be your relative; I was on my return to my native land, crushed with the idea that my own Theodore was either united to another, or that he was dead, and an impostor had assumed his place. I confess that the latter was my ruling impression. But how was I,—a defenceless woman and a foreigner, in a great city where I was a stranger—how was I to institute the necessary inquiries to elucidate that profound mystery? Now you have inspired me with hope—oh! with wild and burning hope that my Theodore yet lives, and that we are not far apart!"

Surely the hand of Providence is visible in those circumstances which thus brought you and me together in a lonely hut amidst the eternal snows of the Alps. But I will narrate to you at length my sad story; and you will then judge whether the fond, constant, faithful heart of woman, be enabled to guide her in discriminating between him who first captivated that heart, and another who has obtained, heaven knows by what wondrous means, his rank and name!"

Irene paused for a few moments.

Her words—fervid and impassioned like the hearts of the children of that land to which she owed her birth—had produced a deep impression not only on the young artist, but also on the Italian peasant and the two Carniolan mountaineers.

And, as she spoke in that glowing language which is so akin to the poetry of her own clime, her magnificent countenance was lighted up with a species of holy enthusiasm,—her large black eyes were fired with the generous ardour of her soul,—and joyous hopes were expressed in her sweet smile.

The red flames of the fire played with a brilliant lustre upon that charming countenance,—shadowing forth with Rembrandt effect the faultless lines of her Grecian profile,—filling her swimming eyes with light,—and illuminating the glory of her dark black hair!

Solemn was the attention with which the young artist, the Italian peasant, and the hardy mountaineers, listened to her tale, which she narrated at the same length as when she told it to Ida;—and profound was the respect with which her audience contemplated the necklace that she exhibited to their view.

"You can understand," she said, in conclusion, "the deep interest which I now feel in the elucidation of the mystery which has inspired this generous young man and his companion," alluding to Pianalla and Mazzini, "with the design of prosecuting their search along the secret path leading to the place of the Baron's confinement; for a voice seems to whisper to me that it is my own Theodore who is the prisoner. Never will I quit these mountains until that mystery be cleared up; and you, my friends," she continued, addressing her Carniolan guides, "will join in the prosecution of this enterprise. You will not repent your devotion to this cause; for I am rich,—and your recompense shall be dealt forth with no niggard hand."

The two mountaineers gladly assented to the proposal to join Pianalla and Mazzini in the enterprise.

One of the hardy Carniolans then spread the contents of his saddle-bag upon the table; and Irene partook of a slight refreshment. When she had terminated her repast, the mountaineers sat down with a good appetite to the meal, and made light work of the solid viands before them.

Their supper being at length ended, the whole party drew round the fire to deliberate upon the best method of prosecuting the common object in view.

Otto and Mazzini, each in his turn, related the adventures which had respectively befallen them in the stronghold where the Baron of Czernin was confined; and, when they compared notes, as to locality, with the mountaineers, they all came to the unanimous conclusion that the convent must be the place in which that nobleman was confined.

"The plan which I should now propose to adopt is this," said Otto. "Mazzini and myself are both known by the armed men, be they who they may, in the building where the Baron is detained. We cannot, therefore, risk certain destruction to our project by boldly proceeding to the convent by the proper path, and demanding hospitality. You, lady, and your guides can, however, do so without exciting a suspicion; and when in the building you may make observations which will enable us to judge whether it really be the place wherein Mazzini and myself saw the Baron. While you repair to the convent to-morrow by the proper path, of which one of these brave mountaineers spoke ere now, Mazzini and myself will continue our examination of the secret way which there can be little doubt we have discovered. As soon as both parties—you, lady, with your guides on the one hand, and I with my companion on the other—are satisfied with the result of these separate proceedings, this hut shall be the place of appointment where we will all meet again. What steps we may next take, to crown our labours with the success to which we aspire, will then depend upon circumstances."

This plan was approved of by Irene, the Italian, and the mountaineers.

It was now late; and, all preliminary arrangements in

respect to the next day's enterprise being duly discussed and settled, the party disposed themselves to rest.

Irene wrapped herself closely in her thick Oriental shawls, and lay down in one department of the hut.

A fire was lighted in the other, and thither the four men retired.

The night passed without any fresh incident.

At sunrise the travellers were on the alert: the morning meal was quickly disposed of; and they then set out, each party on its respective expedition.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE CONVENT.

We will follow, in the first instance, the progress of the Lady Irene and her two hardy mountaineer-guides.

Mounted each on a sure-footed mule, they retraced so much of their path of the preceding day's journey as led them back into the road from which they had deviated during the darkness of the tourment.

An hour's travelling brought them to a ledge, not more than four feet wide, running round the top of a gorge or valley, which was frightfully precipitous to a considerable depth, and then, forming a small plain, declined very slightly towards a little lake.

"It was along this ledge, lady," said one of the mountaineers, looking coolly into the depths below, "that we came last night ere we reached the hut."

"And did you not know that we were in such a fearful vicinity?" asked Irene, glancing with a shudder at the precipice, which even in the broad daytime seemed ready to receive the traveller along that giddy ledge.

"If I had been aware that such was our way, I certainly should not have chosen it," was the reply. "But you may trust these sure-footed animals as well in the dark as the light. You see, lady, we lost our way so completely that neither my comrade nor myself knew where we were. But, as you observed last night, Providence seemed to have so ordained it, that you might meet with the young gentleman whose information concerning the convent has changed all your plans."

"When do you suppose that we shall reach the convent?" inquired Irene.

"Not much before dusk, lady," was the answer.

They proceeded along the ledge, Irene's confidence in the safety of her mule becoming every moment more firm, as she saw with what assurance, as it were, the sagacious animal proceeded.

The banks of the lake in the depths below were rich with verdure; and on its surface the picturesque mountains and the towering majesty of the snow-crested hills were reflected as in a broad mirror.

But we will not grow tedious with our feeble attempts at the description of Alpine scenery: neither will we detail each petty incident which marked the journey of Irene and her guides to the gate of the convent.

Suffice it to say that it was an hour after sunset when they reached a large straggling building, most singularly placed, as it were in a nest, on one of the lesser eminences of the Julian Alps.

Let the reader conceive the apex or summit of a mountain completely hollowed out so as to form a species of crater, at the bottom of which the convent was built.

Thus the structure was surrounded by natural walls which towered above the artificial ones, the former completely protecting the latter not only from the violence of storms, but also from the possibility of an attack by men; for the heights above were perfectly inaccessible to a human foot.

Cradled in a hollow, thus strangely formed by Nature, the convent was shrouded from all observation, save in those points where two fissures in the circumjacent heights afforded a view of its chimneys to those travellers who passed over neighbouring eminences in particular directions. One of these fissures communicated with the path up which Irene and her two companions toiled towards the gate: the other was on the opposite side of the mountain, and was continued in a gorge or defile towards a profound precipice.

But even those fissures, and the avenues of communication to which they thus led, did not render the convent the less impregnable; because a cannon planted at the top of the path, and another to command the gorge or defile, would have swept away any beleaguering forces that could possibly congregate in either of those points.

Arrived at the gate of the convent, one of the mountaineers pulled a massive iron ring hanging outside, and a bell clanked hoarsely within.

In a few minutes a red-faced monk, holding a lantern

in his hand, opened the gate; but his manner was by no means in unison with the jollity of his rubicund visage.

"What would ye?" he demanded in a sharp tone.

"Refuge for the night, holy father," replied one of the mountaineers.

"How many are ye?"

"Three,—a lady and two guides."

"Well,—walk in, good people. The Capuchins never refuse hospitality to benighted travellers."

"A fig for the hospitality that is offered so churlishly," whispered the mountaineer who had previously spoken.

These words were not, however, overheard by the Capuchin, who was employed in opening wider the massive gate, which creaked on its hinges.

"Here, Roderick!" shouted the monk; and his summons was answered by a layman, who wore a huge broadsword by his side. "Take charge of the guides, and show them where to put up their mules. Give them good cheer, too, in the refectory. Lady, follow me: I will conduct you to our matron, who will treat you worthily.

Irene accompanied the Capuchin across a somewhat spacious court to a building, which they entered.

In a small parlour, on the right hand, an elderly woman was busily employed in knitting the peculiar kind of hose worn by the mountaineers, not only of that period, but which have undergone very little variation even down to the present time.

"Dame Mildreda," said the monk, "here is a lady who seeks our hospitality. To your care I entrust her. The Virgin give thee good dreams, my daughter."

With this holy wish,—comprising the first words savouring of his profession which Irene had as yet heard fall from the friar's lips,—the Capuchin departed; and the matron, taking up a lamp from the table, said, "Follow me, lady."

"Irene accompanied the matron up a narrow stone staircase, and was ushered into a handsomely-furnished room. The wood was already laid in the grate; the matron set fire to it; and the cheerful flames speedily roared up the ample chimney.

Dame Mildreda then left the room, saying that she should return in a few minutes; and while she was absent, Irene examined the apartment wherein she found herself.

Suddenly an ejaculation of surprise escaped her lips.

Was it possible?

Yes—all previous suspicions were confirmed!

*There were no windows in the sides of the room; but there was a large sky-light on the roof!*

She remembered the description of that apartment given not only by Mazzini, but also by Otto Pianalla; and, clasping her hands enthusiastically together, the beautiful woman murmured to herself, "Yes—this is the place in which my beloved Theodore languishes a prisoner!"

At that moment the door opened, and Mildreda made her appearance with a tray containing several dishes, and a flagon of wine.

"Here is wherewith to refresh yourself, lady," she said; "and there," she added, pointing to a door on the opposite side from which she had entered, "is your bed-chamber. Good night."

"Good night," answered Irene; "and many thanks for your attentions."

Dame Mildreda then withdrew.

"Oh!" exclaimed Irene, when she was once more alone, "if it really be true that I am now within the same walls as my beloved Theodore, God grant that the hours of our separation are at length numbered! For thou, Almighty God, knowest the purity of my heart, and that I am not selfish! Were he united to another, whom he really loves, I would pray for them both;—but, oh! that man—that impostor whom I saw in Vienna—no—no—he is not the Theodore whom I knew, and whom I loved!"

Irene's impassioned soliloquy was interrupted by a sudden and strange rumbling noise on that side of the chamber where the bed-room door was situate.

She started: her blood ran cold in her veins.

Could treachery be intended?

She was in a place where she believed every atrocity to be possible; and she was almost paralyzed with fear.

The noise was repeated: it seemed as if someone were moving between the wainscot and the wall.

Suddenly a panel in the wood-work which surrounded the chamber gave way; and two men precipitated themselves into the apartment.

"Holy Virgin protect me!" cried Irene aloud, sinking upon her knees, and clasping her hands together.

"That voice—is it possible?" ejaculated one of the beings who had thus strangely introduced themselves.

The Greek lady started upon her feet; it was Otto Pianalla who had spoken!

She turned round: and, to her ineffable joy, the young artist and the peasant Mazzini met her eyes.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE ROOM IN THE CONVENT.

Irene was scarcely more astonished to behold her two allies thus suddenly and strangely make their appearance, than were they to find themselves not only in the presence of the Greek lady, but also in the room which both of them recognised so well.

They all three, however, soon recovered from the effects of this incident—so unexpected on both sides—and they could not suppress a smile when they remembered the momentary terror which they had all experienced—Irene in perceiving two men thus marvellously introduce themselves, and her allies in being so abruptly precipitated into a chamber belonging to the very building for which they had been searching.

The moment they were all three sufficiently composed to devote serious attention to their affairs, Irene secured the chamber door, and Mazzini replaced the movable panel in its setting.

They then proceeded to explanations.

Irene informed her companions of the particulars of her day's journey, and of her admittance into the convent; and Otto next related the adventures of himself and Mazzini since the morning.

"Immediately after we parted with you, lady, and your trusty mountaineers, Mazzini and myself took the road leading to the right. We found that it lay almost in a straight and level line between the frowning glaciers on either side; and thus for nearly two hours we pursued our way without interruption. At the expiration of that time, we came to a small chapel, where two paths again branched off. We were now totally at a loss which to follow, and at length it was determined that I should take one and Mazzini the other. We agreed to pursue our respective ways each, and return to the chapel as a point of reunion when our investigation on either side arrived at a climax.

"We accordingly parted. I pursued my path for two hours, when I found that it gradually grew narrower, and at last entered a dark cavern about six yards in length. I advanced to the end; the most profound obscurity reigned within. I stretched out my arms to guide myself, and my hands came in contact with the woodwork of a door in a partition. I now felt convinced that the object of my search was attained; but, being alone, I dared not carry my investigations further. Moreover, I considered that Mazzini would be uneasy did I delay my return to the place of meeting, should he reach it before me. I accordingly retraced my way, and arrived at the chapel at mid-day. But Mazzini had not yet returned. I was, therefore, compelled to await his presence. Hour after hour passed, and he did not come. The sun set behind the western glaciers, and I grew very uneasy. At length a figure suddenly approached the chapel, and in another moment, by the light of the lovely moon, I recognised Mazzini. I may as well state for him that he had wandered amidst wild, devious, and dangerous defiles, without observing anything calculated to afford him a trace in the object of his search; that he had at length lost himself; and that it was only after the most arduous toil amidst the mountains that he had been enabled to retrace his way. He was, however, delighted to learn that I had been more successful than himself; and we determined to proceed to the cavern the moment he had somewhat recovered from the fatigue. Accordingly, having partaken of some refreshment, we pursued our way; and in less than two hours—for I was now familiar with the path—we arrived at the mouth of the cavern. We had no settled plan—we could have none: our proceedings were to be regulated by circumstances. And here I must observe, that although Mazzini had expressed, when he and I first set out, his determination to regulate his own conduct by the utmost caution; yet, when he found that your interests, lady, were so deeply concerned, and my wishes so intimately connected with this investigation, he generously threw aside all reserve, and bravely declared that he would venture amongst all perils to assist us!"

A glance of deep gratitude from the dark eyes of the Greek lady rewarded the Italian peasant for his gallant behaviour.

"When we found ourselves in the cavern, lady," pur-

sued Otto, "we sat down for a few moments, and conversed in whispers; we deliberated what course we should pursue. Presently, we heard voices—female voices—near us; they seemed to emanate from an inner cavern, or from some place behind that wooden partition which I had before discovered. Still, so indistinct and faint were the sounds, that we could not catch the meaning of the words."

"Those voices must have been my own and the matron's," observed Irene.

"Assuredly so, lady," returned Otto. "Then we resolved to approach the partition as noiselessly as possible, and listen. We fancied that if we could only overhear a portion of the conversation, it might serve as a guide to our proceedings. Moreover, a suspicion—faint and distant, and yet having a certain existence—prompted me that you, lady, might have been successful in obtaining an entry into the convent; and that one of those voices was probably yours. You know how fantastic and vague those hopes and suspicions are in the moments of danger or uncertainty; and yet how ready we are to bestow faith upon the impulses which they suggest, or the promises which they hold out. Accordingly, I took Mazzini's hand, for the purpose of conducting him cautiously amidst the profound obscurity of the cavern, and we thus descended the steps. But scarcely had I reached the bottom, when my foot slipped, and I was precipitated violently against the panel, dragging Mazzini with me. The panel flew open, and light suddenly flashed upon our eyes. Lady, you know the rest."

"Most fortunate was that accident which thus united us in that chamber," observed Irene. "But what steps shall we now take? I do not imagine that there is the remotest danger of any interruption here during the night: we have therefore leisure to deliberate—or even to act!"

The Greek lady spoke with considerable emphasis. Otto could well understand her meaning; for her noble and affectionate heart was impatient to convey tidings of hope to him whom she had never ceased to love, and whom she believed to be a prisoner within the walls of that convent.

How sincere, how beautiful, is a woman's love! Poets and novelists have too often depicted it as evanescent and fickle; but they have not rightly comprehended the passion. They have mistaken the caprices of a coquette for the attachment of a virtuous and disinterested heart. No, woman's love is not a name which may be printed on the "moon's pale beam," it is permanent and durable—it is the noblest, the most holy, and the most heaven-like sentiment which ever animates this mortal clay. Degrade not the sacred name of love—that flame which burns so brightly and so purely upon the altar of the heart, like the acceptable sacrifice of Abel unto his God, degrade it not by confounding it with the weak, vacillating, and changeable feeling of the capricious heart.

Let not the hand of Cain disfigure that holy image of the Deity's own affection for the human race. For the love of the pure female heart knows no abatement, and is willing to make any sacrifices; it encounters all perils and dares all dangers; it smooths the pillow of sickness, and mitigates the pangs of the death-bed. It is an essence apart from all sensuality; it perishes only with life itself. No, it does not even perish then, for, from the empyrean heights of another and better world, it watches over the object of its interest on earth. And, oh, if the doctrine of the Pythagorean creed be true—if it be given to the souls of the departed to revisit this earth in other shapes, and to renew their being in other mortal forms—then may we imagine that the pure spirit which cheered man's rugged path on earth will come back on the wing of the bird, and pour into his ears assurances of unchanged affection, in the rich melody of song!

So pure, so holy, so devoted was the love of the charming Greek lady for him to whom her first and only troth had been pledged, that, next to her God, his image formed the object of all her adoration and all her interest—and his welfare, now that she deemed him to be in captivity, was the end of all her aims.

"There are two projects which suggest themselves to my mind," said Otto, after a long and solemn silence, during which they all three deliberated in their own minds upon the various ideas which suggested themselves for their guidance; "the first is for myself and Mazzini to remain in the cavern until midnight, and then steal into the building and ascertain, if possible, how many armed defenders it contains, and the situation of its different compartments."

"No," said Irene, "you might be discovered; and those who are vile enough to retain a German noble in a long imprisonment would not hesitate to ensure the safety of their secret by means of a crime of a deeper dye; because they would recognise you as having been here before."

"My other project is this," continued Otto. "In the morning, the matron will doubtless come hither to attend upon you, lady, and bring you refreshments. We may then seize her, and by dint of menaces of death—menaces which will, of course, be merely used as a stratagem—elicit from her the particulars which we require."

Both Irene and Mazzini coincided in favour of this latter plan.

The lady then retired to the inner chamber, and threw herself upon the couch. The fatigues which she had experienced soon plunged her into a profound repose. Delicious dreams visited her; the hand of Sleep opened the gates of Fancy's temple, and thence emanated a joyous throng of hopes which smiled upon the slumbering lady.

Sleep, fair one! Thy conscience is unacquainted with a single misdeed; thy life has been as pure as thy love is chaste. Though the daughter of a burning clime, thy feelings have never outraged thy virgin innocence, and thy soul is but one remove from that of the angels!

Sleep, beauteous one! Thou has endured much, but never did repinings at thy fate lessen the merit of that martyrdom of the heart. Never hast thou forgotten each night and each morn to pour forth the gratitude of thy fervent piety to the Disposer of all events; and while thine afflictions were borne meekly and resignedly, thou didst find consolation in thy prayers, which ever terminated with the holy inspiration—"THY WILL BE DONE!"

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE MATRON.

YES, calmly and deliciously slept the Lady Irene.

Cradled in her little chamber on that Alpine height, like the innocent bird in its nest on the top of a lofty tree, she dreamt not of peril nor danger, but of hope, and success, and love.

Mazzini and Otto, wrapped in their cloaks, snatched repose by turns in front of the cheerful fire—one remaining awake to keep watch while the other courted slumber.

Thus passed the night—in silence and security.

The morning dawned, and the rays of the gorgeous sun penetrated through the skylight of the room.

Then, also, Irene came forth from her chamber, and the three individuals who were thus generously endangering themselves in behalf of the captive prepared for the execution of the scheme on which they had resolved.

Otto and Mazzini concealed themselves in the inner chamber, with the understanding that they were only to appear when Irene should ask "What hour of the morning is it now?"

This precaution was necessary, inasmuch as there were no means of reconnoitring the large room from the inner one, which was also lighted by a window on the roof.

As it had been anticipated, the matron presently made her appearance, bearing a well-spread tray in her hands.

"Good morning, lady," she exclaimed, closing the door behind her. May I hope that you have recovered from your fatigues of yesterday?"

"I have slept pleasantly," said Irene, "thanks to your hospitality."

"I bring you refreshments, lady," continued Dame Mildreda. "Your servitors have already partaken of their morning meal, and—"

"And you wish to know when I shall be prepared to take my departure?" added Irene. "Is it usual to hurry your guests in this establishment? Methought that the convents in the Alps were established chiefly for the purpose of granting an asylum to those wayworn travellers who required such accommodation; but it appears that I have been mistaken! However, if I have given much trouble, I am ready to remunerate liberally those whom I may have inconvenienced."

"Lady," answered Mildreda, "your words cut me to the quick! Think not that I myself am of a niggard disposition, or that I would sell hospitality for gold. But I am not my own mistress. I serve others, and am compelled to act in obedience to their will and good pleasure. Father Anselm—the superior—is a man who will not speak his commands twice. Neither do I retain my present situation in this lonely place through choice;



but were I to leave it, I have no home—no hope elsewhere."

"My good woman, I did not mean to vex you," said Irene, gradually moving between Mildreda and the door, in order to cut off her retreat; and for this reason alone did she prolong the dialogue. "At the same time you must admit that you execute the commands of somewhat churlish superiors—especially as I am not one of that sex whose constitutions are better able to endure short rest and early journeys. But I will detain you no longer. *What time of the day is it now?*"

"Scarcely were these words uttered, when the door of the inner room flew open, and Otto sprang upon Dame Mildreda, on whose mouth his hand was instantly placed, ere she had even time to utter a single ejaculation.

Mazzini appeared immediately behind him, brandishing a naked dagger.

"Silence, as you value your life!" exclaimed Otto, while Irene fastened the door communicating with the staircase. "No harm shall befall you, if you reply faithfully and truly to a few questions which I have to put to you, but I declare most positively that you will bitterly repent any attempt to summon assistance or create an alarm. Moreover, such a course—even did it succeed in bringing hither the cut-throat myrmidons of your Superior—would be unavailing, for in the cavern with which that panel communicates—ah, you start! you see that I am not ignorant of the mysteries of this place! But, as I was observing, in that cavern are twelve of our friends, all well armed, and ready to enter this accursed den at a moment's warning! Then hopeless indeed would be the position of ye all! Once more, I enjoin you, maintain silence, save when addressed by me or my companions, who are now here, and no injury shall you sustain."

Mazzini could not altogether suppress a smile at the idea of their twelve coadjutors in the cavern; but the matron firmly believed every word that was uttered by the young artist.

Otto now removed his hand from the mouth of the terrified woman, and conducted her to a seat. Then, when she had somewhat recovered from the trepidation into which this sudden incident had thrown her, he proceeded to question her in the following manner:—

"Is there not a prisoner confined within the walls of this convent?"

"There is, sir; but pray do not injure me, and I will tell you all I know!" exclaimed Mildreda, in an imploring manner.

"Speak freely—you shall not be harmed! Mazzini, put up your dagger; this good woman sees that there is no utility in deceiving us. You say that there is a prisoner within these walls. What is his name?"

"I am not acquainted with it—I never heard it! Nor, indeed, have I ever seen him. He is confined in the Covered Court, as it is called, and my avocations do not lead me thither. But I have heard it whispered that he is a German nobleman."

"Ah!" ejaculated Irene, now painfully agitated with the most acute suspense.

"And that he is about forty years of age—very handsome, but pale!" added Mildreda.

"There can be no doubt that it is he!" cried Irene, clasping her hands together. "How long has he been a prisoner here, good woman?"

"Eight years, or thereabouts," was the answer. "He was brought in the night-time, and with great mystery. But the men will talk sometimes, lady; and the few particulars I know about him I have learnt from Karl, Conrad, and others of our folk."

"Eight years!" repeated Irene. "Eight years of captivity!"

"And has he never once been free during that interval?" demanded Otto. "No! Then my fears are all confirmed; and that man who now bears his name in Vienna, and who is the husband of my sister, is an impostor."

"Vex not yourself with that misfortune, good Otto," said Irene, in a gentle voice. "Your sister shall be nobly cared for."

"Thanks, lady!" replied Pianella. "Still the disgrace. But of that no matter now. We have little time to waste. Then, turning to the matron once more, he said, 'Have you ever seen anyone who is very much like the prisoner?'"

"I do not understand you, sir," answered Mildreda, surveying Otto with a surprise which proved her sincerity.

"I mean, is there a person, bearing an extreme resemblance to the prisoner, and who sometimes visits the convent?" continued the artist.

"Never; I know no such person."

"Are you aware wherefore, or upon what pretence, the unhappy man is confined here?"

"Holy Virgin protect us!" cried the matron. "Surely the poor gentleman of whom you speak is mad, and is placed here by his relatives."

"Mad!" screamed Irene, wildly. "Oh! no—no," and she clasped her hands together.

"Fear not, lady," said Otto, in a profoundly compassionate tone; "that is naught save a vile subterfuge. When he spoke to me through the *guichet*, he was subdued with sorrow, but his intellects were quite unimpaired."

"And such was the impression he made upon me when I saw him six years ago," added Mazzini.

"God grant that it may be!" ejaculated Irene, fervently.

"You have no proof, of your own knowledge, that the prisoner is actually as he is represented to be!" continued Otto, again addressing himself to the woman.

"Now, good youth, now I dare say it is all false. But, alack! who would think that the monks, who pray so fervently, and perform mass and vespers so regularly, could be so wicked!" exclaimed Dame Mildreda.

"Who is the Superior of the convent?" inquired Otto.

"Father Anslem, a stern, harsh, reserved man, and who, they say, is fond of gold."

"Gold, gold! always gold at the bottom of every crime!" murmured Otto to himself.

"Will you now inform us whether Fritz is privy to all this villany?" asked Mazzini; "or does he believe that the prisoner is mad, as you do?"

"Messer Fritz is a close man, sir," answered the woman; "and never lets his tongue go too freely."

"Now, listen to me attentively," said Otto. "Our object is to release the prisoner of whom we have been speaking. I before assured you that we have competent aid close by," he continued, glancing towards the panel; "but were I to admit my followers, they would sack the convent, and murder everyone within its walls."

"Holy Virgin protect us!" groaned the affrighted Mildreda, glancing uneasily around.

"I am, therefore, anxious to avoid so sad a catastrophe," pursued the artist. "Can you serve us? and will you be faithful? If we trust you, beware how you deceive us: if you aid us, great shall be your reward."

"Yes; your reward shall be beyond all your most sanguine expectations," exclaimed Irene. "I am rich, and I can give you a fortune which will render your old age happy, and enable you to pass the remainder of your existence in some clime more congenial than those regions of everlasting snow."

"I can, and I will serve you," said the matron, after a few moments' consideration; "and I will contrive in such a manner, that you, sir," she added, looking at Otto, "may accompany me in what I am about to do. Then, if you see aught that may lead you to suspect me of treachery, treat me according to my deserts. But, if I fulfil my engagements, I shall claim the reward which that lady offers me. I am wearied of a residence in this cheerless place, and my necessities have alone compelled me to endure it so long."

"You speak fairly, dame," said Irene. "State the project you have in view."

"My own room is on the ground floor of this part of the building," continued the matron, reassured by the hopes held out to her. "You, sir, can accompany me to my apartment, and, should any person question you, I can represent you to be a nephew, come to pay me a visit. It will not be difficult for me to obtain the keys of the gate opening into the middle court of the convent; and then it will be easy to communicate with the prisoner, who is allowed to walk about in a farther court still during the daytime."

"Does that farther court terminate by a high wall, wherein there is a huge door with a small *guichet*?" asked Otto.

"You must have seen it, sir, to be able to describe the place so accurately," said Mildreda.

"Did I not assure you that all the secrets of this establishment are well known to us?" asked the young artist, with a smile. "But, even supposing that you can enable me to communicate with the prisoner, what chance will there be of effecting his escape from the convent, without the exercise of force and violence on our part?"

"There are never more than two of the men-at-arms on duty in the middle court at a time," said the woman;

"and I will undertake to amuse them with a flask of strong waters in such a manner that they shall be no hindrance to the escape of him in whom you are interested. But, on second thoughts," she added, "if the scheme could be delayed until night—when it is dark—there would be no danger of detection."

"I dislike delays," said Otto, fearful that the woman might betray him and his companions when her mind became composed, and the effects of his menaces had worn off; and yet he dared not attempt the project by daylight.

"I understand you, sir," she observed, apparently hurt by his observation. "You will not trust me; and, alas! I can say nothing and do nothing to induce you to place confidence in me. Nevertheless, will you not be near me? And cannot you punish the slightest indication of treachery?"

"True," said Otto, musing. "Still, it is impossible but you will be called away from your apartment some time during the day, on your domestic avocations; and then I cannot accompany you."

This he said in order to test her sincerity as much as possible.

"Be it as you will!" exclaimed the woman. "Think you not that the hope of a reward will induce me to serve you? Or do you imagine that I am anxious to remain during life in this miserable abode?"

"Trust her, my dear friend," said Irene, approaching Otto, and whispering in his ear.

"Provided I place confidence in you," continued the artist, "by what excuse can this lady remain here until evening? For it must be by means of the secret passage that the escape will be effected; and, moreover, I have my reasons for not being seen by the inmates of this place."

"Let her feign indisposition, sir, and leave the rest to me. I have, however, one favour to ask of you."

"Speak," said Irene, hastily.

"When you depart, you must permit me to accompany you. My share in the escape of the prisoner would be suspected, and my life would become a sacrifice to the resentment of the Superior. For they say, sir," she continued, sinking her voice to a low whisper, and casting a timid glance around, "that he is a man of extraordinary influence and power—that all the south-western part of Carniola trembles at his name—that he is the chief of some terrible association in this district, whose means of detecting and punishing enemies are hidden but sure; and that—"

"Ah! I remember those terrible menaces which were addressed to me in this very apartment," interrupted Mazzini, with a shudder.

"And I, too, now comprehend in whose power the unfortunate captive is retained," said the artist, in a solemn tone; "but that peril does not daunt me."

"What is this mystery of which you speak?" asked Irene, pale and trembling.

"Lady," answered Otto, in a low and subdued tone, "there are in Germany certain associations, of which, perhaps, you have never heard. Their power is, however, formidable—their daring beyond all limit. Yes; the prisoner is in the custody of one of the chiefs of the Secret Tribunal—a captive in a stronghold of the Holy Vehm!"

"And is escape now impossible for him?" demanded Irene, leaning against the wall for support.

"No, lady! The members of that league are only human beings like ourselves, and, as such, may be baffled—deceived! And to baffle and deceive them now shall be my task. Oh, I comprehend it all—this inhospitality on the part of the monks—this secret passage—this well guarded convent! Yes—it is a stronghold of the Vehm! But we cannot remain in idle parlance here; some immediate plan must be adopted. You, lady, will leave the convent at once, with your mountaineers, and retrace your way to the hut where we rested the night before last. Mazzini and myself will return to the chapel, and at sunset we will once more be in the cavern adjoining this room. It will then be your duty," he added, turning towards the matron, "to meet us in his chamber. My friend and I will alone cross the threshold of that secret door; but, remember, our companions will not be far behind us."

"Be it as you will," said the woman; "you will find me ready and willing to serve you."

"And, in the meantime, receive this as an earnest of my promises," observed Irene, drawing from her finger a ring of great price, and presenting it to the matron, who received it with many expressions of gratitude.

"One word more," said Otto. "Should this lady be hurried into any danger through your means, after we leave the room by your panel, we shall be near to succour her."

"You need not menace me, sir; to-morrow you will applaud me," answered the woman, calmly, but firmly.

Otto and Mazzini then took leave of the Greek lady, and passed out of the room by means of the secret way.

For some time they remained in the cavern; but in half an hour they were aware that Irene had taken her departure.

They then retraced their steps to the chapel.

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE PASTY AND THE FLASK OF STRONG WATERS.

The rays of the setting sun fell, with the hues of the rainbow, upon the glaciers of the Julian Alps, the Protean beams gradually assuming a variety of forms and shades of colour, as it yielded to the increasing obscurity of the evening.

Strange are the phenomena of the light in those wilds of eternal snow.

Reflected upon the huge piles of ice, from which the evening gale had swept their fleecy covering, the rays seemed to sport and play even in the last moments of their existence—now breaking forth in streams of refulgent lustre, but evanescent as bright—now flashing like the vivid lightning, then wreathing all the prismatic colours in one beam of splendour—now variegating the Alpine heights with illusions of the most luxuriant and enchanting scenery—now gleaming dimly in short radiations, then seeming to die suddenly and abruptly altogether—now again reviving like a flickering lamp, and kindling up rows of beams, wherewith to sport upon those mighty and inaccessible peaks—now emitting bright coruscations, like the phenomena of hyperborean climes—now changing from liquid white to fiery red, then oscillating once more with a thousand variations, until gradually they grew fainter and fainter—expiring, however, like the chameleon, with myriads of changing hues—so that at length the pomps of that Alpine sunset yielded to obscurity and night.

To the eyes of Otto, who surveyed all the wonders, the glories, and the phenomena of Nature, as a worshipper and an artist, this scene was sublime, solemn, and awe-inspiring.

For a few moments he remained absorbed in deep thought, marvelling at the power of that Omnipotence which speaks to man in so many and such impressive ways.

But Mazzini touched him upon the shoulder; and the young artist was recalled unto himself.

Then they pushed onwards to the cave.

"Draw your dagger, and prepare, lest treachery await us," whispered Otto to his companion.

"I shall not sell my life cheaply," answered the Italian, in a determined tone.

Otto descended the steps, and knocked gently at the panel.

It was immediately opened; and the matron, holding a lamp in her hand, appeared within.

Otto stepped boldly into the room; and Mazzini immediately followed him.

The matron received them with a calm and unruffled countenance; but the two adventurers could not avoid casting a hasty glance around.

"Do not mistrust me," said the woman. "Read this."

And she presented to Otto a small plate or leaf of ivory extracted from the tablets which ladies were in the frequent habit of carrying about with them in those times.

The artist hastily glanced over the leaf, and read these words:—

*"I write this outside of the convent, at a turn in the path where the porter cannot see me, but to which point the matron has hurried after me, under the pretence of bringing me a shawl that I left behind, yet in reality to obtain some proof of my safety wherewith to reassure you, and convince you of her fidelity when you return this evening. May God prosper you, excellent friends!"*

"IRENE."

"Now shall I proceed confidently in this work," exclaimed Otto. "My good woman, you have behaved truthfully, and your reward, at the hands of that generous lady, will be ample."

"I can pardon any suspicions which you may have previously entertained," said the matron. "Where will your friend remain while you accompany me?"

"In the cavern outside," was the answer.

Mazzini accordingly withdrew once more through the secret means of egress.

"There is no danger that I shall encounter any of the armed ruffians in your room?" said Otto, interrogatively.

"None," answered Mildreda.

"It is not that I am afraid of them," continued the artist; "but they have seen me before, and might recognise me."

"Perhaps you are the young gentleman who was brought blindfolded into this room a few days ago?" said the matron.

"I am. But how knew you that incident?"

"I saw Fritz and his men convey you hither," was the reply.

"One question, good dame," said Otto. "Have you seen many persons conducted with their eyes bandaged to this apartment, in order to be removed from the convent by the secret path?"

"Four or five only, during the ten years that I have been here; and all those since the confinement of the prisoner whom we are now to rescue."

The matron then moved towards the door, and Otto followed her.

In a few minutes they reached in safety her apartment on the ground floor. There she provided herself with a flask of strong waters and a meat pie, and assumed the hood and cloak of a monk.

"Now follow me," she said, "and do not utter a word on any account. I have my tale ready plumed, and success is certain."

They issued forth, and entered the courtyard. This they crossed without interruption, and reached a door, which the matron opened by means of a key that she had already obtained on some pretence from the clavier, or porter, of that part of the building.

They entered the middle court, and were immediately accosted by two men-at-arms.

"Who goes?" cried one. "Give us your blessing, holy father."

"Nay—it is no holy father, but a wicked, sinful woman," answered the matron, in a jesting tone. "But, silence, good Karl—silence, Conrade!" she continued, "and I will tell you what this disguise means."

"And who your companion is also, worthy dame," returned Karl.

But the darkness of the night prevented the soldiers from distinguishing Otto's countenance.

"I will explain myself in a few words," said the matron. "This youth is my nephew, who came to see me ere now. Alas! poor young man, he was struck dumb a month was yesterday, for some sin, no doubt; but he is unable to explain why this judgment was inflicted."

"Lucky he isn't a woman, or the affliction would be a sore one," said Karl, laughing at his coarse jest.

"Listen, now," continued the matron. "Methinks that were he to touch the holy relics of the Cross, and the identical sword that served Peter to lop the soldier's ear—and which said relics, as ye well know, are preserved in our most holy chapel—the judgment would be removed from him. Prythee, then, give me the key of the chapel, and allow me to conduct my unhappy nephew thither!"

"Impossible!" said Karl. "It's as much as my ears are worth."

"Nay, no one will be the wiser that ought not to be," persisted the matron. "And see, I have brought you a nice pasty, and a flask of strong waters, for the night is cold, and—"

"A pasty and a stoup of good liquor are no bad things, are they, Conrade?" interrupted Karl, softening.

"Not at all," replied his comrade.

"And it is cold, too," added Karl, who saw very well that the pasty and strong waters were conditionally only on his compliance with the dame's request.

"Very cold," said Conrade.

"And I am a trifle hungry," observed Karl.

"And I much more than a trifle," exclaimed Conrade.

"Well, what say you?" asked Karl, addressing his fellow soldier.

"I say let's e'en take the pasty and the dram, and lend Dame Mildreda the key," was the unequivocal answer.

"Be it so," said Karl; "and as we have no better place to regale ourselves, let us retire to the shed close at hand. Come, dame, there is a light there, and I will look for the key amongst the others which I have at my belt."

Without waiting for a reply, the two soldiers hastened to a hut, or shed, on an eminence close by, and Otto instantly recollected, by its situation, that it was the same where Fritz and his party had halted with him, while Karl repaired to fetch the key of the courtyard door, on the occasion of his first visit to the convent.

"Do not approach the light, in the name of the Virgin!" said the matron to him, in a hurried whisper.

She then hastened forward, and stood on the threshold of the building alluded to.

A lamp hung from the roof, and Otto drew near enough to obtain a glimpse of the contents of that place.

It was the charnel-house of the convent!

Around the walls stood a number of shrivelled corpses, maintained in an upright position by means of cords fastened beneath their arms to the wood-work.

They had not undergone the process of decomposition, but the skin was yellow and parchment-like, as if it had been tanned, and was drawn tightly over the prominent cheek-bones. The countenances were sunken and hollow, and the lips had shrunk so as to display the glistening teeth. The hair had not fallen off, but hung, matted and dark, upon the shoulders of many; on the heads of others it was lighter and shorter. Even through the horrid disguise of death, it was easy to recognise the outlines of those countenances which had once been the objects of love or veneration on the part of fond relatives.

These were the remains of travellers lost in the mountains, and discovered by the men-at-arms during their hunting excursions. The state of the atmosphere at that height was invariably such—whether in summer or in winter—as to act as a preservative to those relics of mortality, and embalm them, as it were, without suffering them to yield the slightest particle of effluvia.

"Now, good dame, here is the key," said Karl; "but where are the pasty and the flask? So! And a right good pie it is; enough for me and Conrade, but not a whit too much. Wilt thou not join us in the first dram, mother?"

"I drink strong waters!" ejaculated the matron, as if in horror at the idea.

"By my troth, I have seen you do that same evil deed ere now—if an evil deed it be," returned Karl.

"Yes; but I am under a penance at present," said the matron.

"And your nephew? He shall have a taste, in any case," cried Karl; "it will do much towards loosening his tongue; for it ever makes mine wag pretty freely."

"Nay; leave the poor youth alone," exclaimed the matron, barring the way against Karl, who was about to hurry forth, flask in hand. "There is not too much for yourselves. I wish ye a good appetite."

"Thanks, excellent manufacturer of pies and donor of strong waters," said Karl.

Then the two men-at-arms seated themselves on a bench to discuss the articles provided for them.

The matron lost no time in retracing her steps towards the spot where Otto Piaualia was standing.

"Think you that I have managed them cleverly?" said she, in a whisper. "But tarry not a moment! Follow me close! I have the key of the chapel, and that is all we require to ensure success."

"And when those men see us return three in number," observed Otto, "will you be prepared with another stratagem to elude their inquiries?"

"They will need sleep after their potations," answered the dame, significantly.

The matron then led the way towards a low door in a building on the farther side of the courtyard.

But scarcely had they reached that point, when a tall figure emerged from the shadow of the wall, and exclaimed—

"Who goes there?"

"Father Anselm—the Superior," ejaculated the matron, losing all her presence of mind at this sudden and inauspicious encounter.

## CHAPTER XLII.

THAT sudden ejaculation of "Father Anselm—the Superior!" conveyed, quickly as lightning-flash, to Otto's mind a sense of the imminent danger in which he was placed; but, for a few moments, he hesitated how to act.

"Ha! that should be Dame Mildreda's voice!" cried the Superior. "But wherefore this disguise? who is your companion? whither are you going?"

"Holy Virgin forgive me, reverend father!" said the matron, joining her hands together.

"What! is it treachery that you meditate?" exclaimed the Superior. "Yes—it must be! else why this disguise? And, you, sir—who—"

Father Anselm had not time to utter another word. Otto, seeing the desperate position in which he was placed,—the matron every instant losing more of her courage, and the Superior already suspecting that something was wrong,—Otto, we say, perceiving that a bold line of conduct could alone release him from his present dilemma, sprang upon the Superior with the force of a tiger, and hurled him to the ground.

Then placing a knee upon his chest, and the left hand upon his mouth, he drew his dagger with the right hand, and holding it above the prostrate man, said in a low but determined whisper, "Stir not—speak not—or this weapon shall immediately drink your heart's blood. I am desperate—beware how you provoke me."

Turning his head towards Dame Mildreda, who had witnessed this sudden attack and its success with the most profound astonishment, Otto said, "Hasten to unlock this door—and fear nothing: all will yet be well."

While the matron was obeying this command, Otto took the dagger between his teeth, so as to have his right hand free; and, while he continued to mutter the most desperate threats against the Superior, on whose chest his knees pressed like an immense weight of iron, he loosened the cord that the prostrate monk (in accordance with the custom of the Capuchins) wore round his waist. Therewith he hastily bound the priest's arms to his sides, the dark eyes of the Superior glaring ferociously up at him as he performed this operation. But, though a fiend-like malignity raged in the breast of the monk, he dared not attempt to deliver himself nor to summon assistance; for Otto's knee retained him as it were in an iron vice; and the sharp dagger which Otto held in his mouth was so dangerously ready to the grasp of the right hand.

"You will not murder me?" muttered the Superior in a very low tone; for the dreadful menaces which Otto had whispered in a determined voice had alarmed him.

"Not if you remain quiet," answered Pianalla: "your life is safe, provided you thwart me not."

"What would you do? what object have you here?" asked the Superior.

"Silence!" returned Otto, sternly. "I dislike violence—I am not a man of blood; but my position is now such that, by the Holy Virgin! if you utter another word—save in answer to any question that I may put—I will plunge this dagger into your breast!"

The process of binding the priest's arms and this rapid dialogue had occupied much less time than we have required to detail them; and scarcely had Dame Mildreda opened the door, when Otto was prepared to drag the Superior, whom he would not allow to rise from his supine posture, into the chapel, the entrance of which the matron carefully fastened, herself retaining the key.

This edifice was dimly lighted by two wax tapers which were burning before the altar. Otto cast a hasty glance around; and, to his joy, perceived that the coast was clear.

To dispose of the Superior was now a work of but little difficulty. Otto was very far from possessing a cruel disposition;—but he was resolute and determined; and the difficulties of his present position were such as to warrant extreme measures. He, therefore, unhesitatingly stripped off the Superior's hooded cloak, to serve a particular purpose anon, and then bound and gagged him in such a manner that locomotion and utterance became impossible.

Dame Mildreda did not hesitate to assist her young companion in this necessary task; for she knew enough of the Superior to be well aware that no mercy was to be expected at his hands, should he be enabled to release himself and summon assistance ere they could make good their retreat from the convent.

"We shall not be many instants absent," said Pianalla, as he tried the strength of the cord and the security of the knots once more; "and if, on our return, I find that you have attempted to free yourself from these bonds, I will punish you as remorselessly as the public executioner decapitates the condemned criminal."

Pianalla and the matron then crossed the chapel, and reached a door which was bolted and chained inside. To open it, therefore, was the work of a few moments. A lamp burnt in a niche outside; and this Otto took in his hand, to light the way.

Followed by Dame Mildreda, he now descended a spiral staircase, the steps of which he carefully counted. There were seventy-seven; and he now felt perfectly convinced

that he was retracing the very way by which he had been conducted, a prisoner and with eyes bandaged, on the first occasion of his entrance into that convent.

At the foot of the staircase he found himself in a road evidently forming the bottom of a defile in the mountains, and commencing abruptly at the lower point of a fissure in the crater or circular range of heights surrounding the convent, as stated in a preceding chapter. Indeed, this was the second fissure before alluded to; and the road on which it opened was continued to the verge of that yawning precipice along whose verge ran the sloping ridge, with its rudely-formed steps, that had originally tempted Otto on that perilous venture which had led to all the marvellous incidents he had experienced in the Julian Alps.

This road, on which he and Mildreda were now entering, gradually became wider, until it assumed the appearance of a large court; and, indeed, it was under the denomination of the "third court" that the matron had spoken of it to the young artist.

This road and court—in fact, the entire space between the precipitous walls of the cleft mountain—were covered in with a rudely but strongly-constructed roof of fir-wood, supported by numerous pillars of rough stone, placed, without order, and only in those points where such props were required by the heaviness of the weight above.

The enclosure terminated at a high and massive wall, which stretched across the defile, from one inaccessible rock to the other, and in the middle of which there was the ponderous door, with a *guichet*, which has been so often mentioned in the preceding chapters.

Otto could not help admiring the ingenuity with which human hands had adapted its works, in this strange place, to the defences already fashioned by nature,—combining both in such a manner, that this convent was actually an impregnable fortress, and, as such, well suited to the wicked purposes of those who had converted one compartment of it into a prison.

Carefully shading the lamp with his hand, as a strong current of air swept through the spacious court, Otto proceeded on his way, followed by Dame Mildreda.

At length, nearly at the end of the enclosure, and in the immediate vicinity of the angle formed by the stone wall and the solid rock on the right hand, a light, gleaming through a low window, met his eyes.

"That is the prisoner's cell, I believe," whispered the matron.

Thither they immediately proceeded.

A natural cave in the rock had been converted into a human abode, by the formation of a large door to protect the opening, and by cutting a square window through the solid granite itself.

A huge bolt was drawn, so as to keep the door closed. This was immediately pulled back by Otto; and he entered the cell. It was about twelve feet square, and was fitted up with some attention to comfort.

The moment the young artist entered, a man—with a handsome, but pale and profoundly melancholy countenance—rose from a seat near a table, on which was spread an ample but frugal meal.

"Ah! methinks I have seen your face before!" cried the prisoner, surveying Otto with the deepest interest and attention.

"Yes—you spoke to me some days since through the *guichet* of the door in the wall," answered Otto; "and I am come to save you."

"To save me!" ejaculated the prisoner, clasping his hands together. "Oh! is this possible?"

"Speak not—delay not!" returned Otto. "Every moment is precious. Put on this monkish garb," he continued, presenting the prisoner with the Superior's cloak; "and conceal your face with the hood. There!—not a word more! Trust now entirely to me."

The party then issued hastily from the cell, and proceeded at a rapid rate towards the foot of the spiral staircase. This they ascended with speedy steps, and entered the chapel.

All was solemnly silent in the sacred edifice.

Otto hurried forward, and to his joy, found the Superior still lying in the very spot, and in the manner, in which he had left him.

"I regret that I cannot release you now," said Otto; "but my own safety—and that of others—require that I should leave you thus bound and impotent in respect to mischief. Perhaps your misdeeds demand a more signal punishment: but it is not for me to anticipate the decrees of justice."

As the light of the lamp fell upon the countenance of the Superior, who was so gagged as to be unable to utter a word, and yet breathed with comparative freedom, the

young artist was shocked at the expression of demoniac rage and malignity which marked the features of the prostrate man. All the bad passions that were concentrated in the human heart might be read in terrible characters upon that stern, vindictive, and remorseless countenance.

Otto turned away in horror and disgust, and rejoined his companions, who had already reached the door.

Placing the lamp upon the paved floor, and drawing his dagger from its sheath, the artist took the key from the matron's hand.

He opened the door, and looked cautiously forth.

All was still.

Lights gleamed from the windows of the building overlooking the court; but the yard itself seemed deserted.

Ere they quitted the chapel, Otto's eyes fell upon a basket which stood in an obscure nook, and which contained carpenter's tools. Amongst these implements was a hatchet. Hastily seizing it and presenting it to his male companion, he said, "My lord—for I presume you are really the Baron of Czernin—here is a weapon which may be serviceable in case of need."

The other grasped it in a manner which seemed to imply that he would not fail to use it in the moment of peril.

The little party then issued from the chapel, Otto carefully closing the door behind him, and taking away the key.

They proceeded with hasty steps towards the gate opening into the outer court. When they had reached that point, Otto bade his companions wait for a few moments while he hurried to the dead-house. The light was still burning in that receptacle for the defunct lost ones amongst the mountains; and its gleam fell upon the countenances of the two sleeping soldiers, on whom the matron's drugged strong waters had produced the desired effect.

Unwilling to involve Karl in any embarrassment with his Superior,—as it was through his means that the liberation of the prisoner had been effected, although the soldier was certainly unaware of the purpose for which he had lent the key of the chapel,—Otto placed that key among the folds of the sleeper's garments.

He then returned to his companions.

They passed into the next court, and gained the door of the building belonging to that compartment of the establishment.

They hurried up the wide staircase, and entered the room with the skylight upon the roof.

"We are safe—we are safe!" ejaculated Pianalla, unable any longer to contain his joy.

"The Holy Virgin be thanked!" said the liberated prisoner, in a tone solemn and low, but expressive of the most grateful piety.

The artist hastened to draw back the panel, and Mazzini instantly appeared at the opening.

"We have succeeded," said Otto: "the prisoner is with us!"

"Then am I well repaid for all the suspense I have endured for the last half-hour," returned the Italian peasant.

Dame Mildreda passed first into the cavern; the liberated captive went next; and Otto followed, closing the panel behind him.

The little party then pursued its way along the defile.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE GOOD AND THE BAD TIDINGS.

THE individual whom Pianalla had thus succeeded in releasing from imprisonment was a man of apparently forty-one or forty-two years of age.

He was very handsome, in spite of the pallor and the melancholy expression of his countenance; for neither captivity nor sorrow had dimmed the fire of his large and eloquent eyes, nor streaked with silver his rich brown hair.

His features were regular; his teeth brilliantly white and even; his forehead high and intelligent; and his figure graceful and commanding. His voice was pleasing and musical,—though not the less masculine on that account; and his manners were those of a polished nobleman.

Nevertheless, there was a remarkable—nay, a truly marvellous likeness between this personage and the individual who bore the name of the Baron of Czernin at Vienna, and who was the husband of Otto's sister Ida. This similitude was, however, merely an exterior one: the minds of the two were perfectly different. As vulgar

degraded, and low in its ideas as was that of Ida's husband, so elevated, on the other hand, were the soul and intellect of the released captive.

When Otto reflected upon the personal appearance of his sister's husband, and contrasted it with that of the individual whom he had ere now aided to escape from a dungeon, he could come to no other conclusion than that the former was a mere vulgar imitation of the original.

As they proceeded along the pathway, by the light of the moon, Otto allowed Mazzini and Mildreda to advance somewhat a-head, while he entered into conversation with him to whom he had such important news to communicate.

"My lord," he said, "I presume there is no error in the belief which I now entertain—that you are the rightful Theodore Baron von Czernin?"

"I am indeed that most unfortunate person," replied the nobleman; "and heaven alone knows how long my misery would have endured in that accursed place which we have ere now left, had not your noble and generous intervention effected my release. Ah! young man, there is no proof of my gratitude that I will not show you, when once I have the means. Tell me your name—that I may know how to bless you in my prayers."

"My name is Otto Pianalla," was the answer. "But I seek not a reward, my lord: I am an artist by profession; and, fortune having lately smiled upon me, I am not without hopes of successfully fighting my own battles with the world. Enough, however, of myself—at least for the present. I have much—oh! very much—to communicate to your lordship,—good and bad news alike—but the good, I hope, marvellously preponderating over the bad."

"At all events, my dear young friend," said the Baron, "let me hear the good first. I have been for years so accustomed to the rude buffets and persecutions of that same fortune who has turned favourable towards you, that any pleasant tidings must be received by me with the most heartfelt gratitude—even as a man who has been blind for a protracted period suddenly recovers his sight by the skill of a cunning chirurgist."

"I will, then, commence with the good tidings," said Otto. "Your lordship doubtless remembers the name of Irene Notaras?"

"Irene Notaras!" ejaculated the Baron; "my angel—my star—the beacon of hope, in all my despairing moments,—throughout years of affliction! Oh! speak, good youth—what of Irene Notaras?"

"She lives, my lord—and loves you as tenderly as when your vows were first plighted to each other in the gardens of her father's mansion at Damascus."

"Great God, I thank thee!" cried the Baron. "Irene lives, and loves me still! Is it possible? Am I not dreaming? Shall I not awake to the hideous realities of my gloomy cell! No—no! it is not a dream! I am awake—speaking. The lovely moon is above me—the mountains, with their eternal crests of snow, are on either side. Pardon me, young man—pardon the wanderings of my brain; but when a human being has suffered all that I have undergone, he doubts—he suspects—he distrusts the first gleam of hope and happiness. Oh! tell me of Irene Notaras! Do you know her? have you seen her? where is she?"

"I know her, my lord—I have seen her very recently," answered Otto, breaking the happy news with caution. "She was lately in Vienna; thence she came into Carniola. In a word, she actually passed one night in the convent from which you have just escaped; and that, my lord, was last night!"

"Last night!" repeated the Baron; "then she must be near! But—no—a hideous suspicion has suddenly sprung up in my mind:—tell me—is she in the power of those demons? If so, let us return—"

And the nobleman grasped the young artist forcibly by the arm.

"No, my lord—she is safe—she is amidst these very mountains—she is near—in three hours more—"

"In three hours more—" almost gasped the Baron, so acute was his suspense.

"You shall see her—you will meet!" added Otto Pianalla.

The nobleman staggered, and would have fallen, had not the artist supported him.

"Oh, can this be true? Are you indeed a good angel, sent to proclaim the term of my sufferings, and restore me to happiness and to love? Dearest Irene—shall I behold thee so soon again? and hast thou remained faithful to me? Henceforth, let none despise—let none



dare cast a slight upon the noble heart of woman: it is the purest portion of our mortal clay!"

Otto made no answer; a shade passed over his countenance as the Baron uttered these enthusiastic words; for he could not help thinking how great was the contrast between the soul of his sister Ida and that of the chaste and loving Greek.

"I will not ask you how you came to meet Irene—how she happened to find her way into these mountains," continued the Baron, after a short pause, during which he recovered some degree of composure. "Accident could not have contrived those circumstances—heaven must have directed them. But it will be sweet—oh! how sweet!—to hear all this from the lips of my own Irene! You have indeed communicated welcome tidings to my ears, dear young friend; and so far beyond my most sanguine expectations are those good news, that I am now nerved to listen to aught of evil that it may be your duty to impart."

"The bad tidings, my lord, are in respect to your fortune—those vast estates which were once yours," said Otto.

"Once mine!" repeated the Baron. "And how could they have passed away? I have been sore pressed to sign documents which would have conveyed them to my persecutors; but I withstood their menaces—their threats: I refused to purchase my liberty at the expense of all my paternal possessions. I offered half—and my terms were rejected. I have never offended against my sovereign; and, therefore, my property cannot have been confiscated."

"Will your lordship be good enough to answer me one question?" said Otto. "Does there exist, to your lordship's knowledge, an individual whose personal appearance is so closely resembling your own, that those who only judge the outward shape and impress of the coin—without waiting to put the metal itself to the test, to decide whether it be a base alloy or a genuine gold—may be readily deceived by this external similitude?"

"There does indeed exist such a person—than whom the earth contains not a more ungrateful villain," replied the Baron, emphatically. "But what of him?"

"My lord, prepare yourself for the evil tidings to which I have alluded," said Otto. "This person has assumed your name—become possessed of your estates—and has squandered away the vast fortune which he thus succeeded in wresting from the honourable care of the Imperial Chancery."

"What! Gregory Walstein play the noble!" exclaimed Theodore von Czernin, with a scornful laugh. "That base hind riot in my ancestral halls! The estates which a father's generosity and an uncle's care rendered extensive and prosperous, be converted into gold to supply the extravagances and to pay the ignoble pleasures of a wretch like him!"

"I was afraid, my lord, that you would need all your philosophy to hear those tidings from my lips," said Otto. "But the villain has to some extent injured me—for, under a false name, he has married my only sister!"

"Your sister is Walstein's wife!" cried Theodore: then, after a moment's pause, he added, "But were your relatives the lowest serfs that crawl upon the face of the earth, I would raise them up—I would elevate them—I would make them my friends—I would love them for your sake!"

"Ah! my lord, the Lady Irene has not misrepresented the noble qualities of your heart. But you have now heard both the good and the evil tidings which I had to communicate. On the one hand, a charming woman—beautiful, amiable, faithful, and rich,—waits anxiously to clasp you in her arms: on the other, an impostor—a vile, detestable impostor—will perhaps dispute your name and identity."

"The question between us will not be one of long duration," said the Baron, bitterly. "But let us not dwell upon that at present. All my thoughts are upon Irene. Fifteen years have elapsed since I saw her last! Hast ever loved, young man? No! then you cannot divine the extent of that misery which has characterised those fifteen years! What was persecution—what was slavery—what was captivity—what were all these in comparison with separation from her I loved? For to love as I have loved and still love, is to have only one thought—one idea—one object of existence—one hope in this world. It is to be attached to life by only one chord—which may be snapped in a moment! But the link which bound me to this world was firm and strong—because it was never pressed upon by the weight of suspicion or jealousy. Oh! I knew Irene well—I felt convinced that her love was as

permanent as mine—that she could never cease to cherish my image—that she would not forget me, and give her hand to another. This conviction has supported me in my captivity, and has shed beams of hope upon me during a period of fifteen long—wearry years. Had I entertained the least suspicion of her faith, I should have gone mad—I should have dashed my head against the wall of that dungeon from which you are now released me! But I knew that the heart of Irene was no common one—that her soul was pure, and chaste, and full of the holiest inspiration. Thus, even in my captivity, have I had some cheering moments; and then there was often a voice which seemed to whisper in my ear, '*Irene lives! Irene lives only for you!*' Else had my hair turned white—else had my eyes been blinded by my tears! Oh! love is indeed a solace, my dear young friend: it has supported me through the agonies, the anguish, and the woes of fifteen long years!"

Otto was deeply affected by these words which the Baron uttered with so much sincerity.

And now the nature of the path compelled them to proceed one in advance of the other:—the conversation was therefore interrupted.

It was an hour past midnight when the little party reached the hut where Irene and her mountaineers were to await their arrival.

"Lights shine through the crevices—smoke ascends from the chimney!" whispered Mazzini.

"Thank Heaven—the Lady Irene has reached the place in safety!" said Otto, peeping through a chink; but he spoke in a very low tone. "Shall I enter first, my lord, and prepare her for your arrival?"

But before the Baron could answer, the voice of Irene broke with a soft melody upon their ears. In a sweet and plaintive tone she warbled the following words:—

#### SYRIA'S DAUGHTER.

Sadly reclining,  
Fair Syria's daughter  
In an arbour was mourning her fate;—  
The tear-drops, shining,  
Bedewed with water  
Cheeks that were blooming with roses of late.  
Swift as a fountain,  
Glides from the mountain,  
The crystal bright dims each orb of light;—  
Sweetly reposing,  
Those eye-lids, closing,  
Shall find relief in the slumbers of night.

Through the grove ringing,  
Melody making,  
Telling a tale of love to his Rose,—  
Shrillily singing,  
On the night breaking  
The Bulbul's note soothes the maiden's repose.\*  
Visions are smiling,  
Dreams are beguiling,  
Lulling to rest the woes of her breast:—  
Gaily appearing,  
Happy and cheering,  
They chase from her heart the grief that opprest.

Welcome! bright vision,  
Fancy's creation,  
Bringing to mind the image she loves;  
Purely elysian,  
Sweet inspiration,  
Fond as the passion of young turtle doves! †  
O'er the hills breaking,  
Sol is awaking;  
Fly not, blest dream, at that warning beam;  
Tarry awhile yet,  
Linger—and smile yet;  
Pass not away, like a flower on the stream!

"That voice—how well I remember each intonation! that song—how often have I heard her warble it in Damascus!" murmured the Baron, clasping his hands together with holy rapture and devotion, as the plaintive melody was wafted to his ears.

The lady ceased; and now her lover could no longer restrain his impatience.

\* The love of the Bulbul, or Nightingale, for Gul, or the Rose, is proverbial in the East.

† The attachment of turtle-doves is a favourite Oriental emblem.

Tearing himself away from Otto, who vainly endeavoured to hold him back,—for the young artist was fearful lest the surprise should be too sudden for Irene, although she could not do otherwise than entertain the most fervent hopes that Theodore's release would be effected,—pushing open the doors with almost frantic vehemence, the Baron rushed into the hut.

The beautiful Greek sprang forward, and was instantly clasped in his arms.

"Irene!"

"Theodore!"

And they wept with joy,—imprinting a thousand kisses upon each other's lips, cheeks, and foreheads,—straining each other with passionate ardour to their breasts,—murmuring each other's names in voices too tremulous with profound emotions to be able to give utterance to other words!

Oh! bliss supreme—that re-union of two fond hearts! Not an eye that contemplated the affecting spectacle was unmoistened with a tear.

At length the tender pair tore themselves from each other's embrace; but it was only that Irene might express her heartfelt gratitude to those who had been instrumental in rescuing her well-beloved Theodore from his captivity.

"To you, generous youth," she said, addressing herself to Otto, "I know not how to speak. This brave Italian will receive a reward at my hands. Mildreda shall also be well provided for. But to you, Otto—dear Otto," she continued, "what can I say? I offer you the affection of a sister—and to my Theodore you shall be a brother! You must not leave us—it will be our duty to study your happiness!"

And she glanced towards the Baron.

"Most cordially—most sincerely do I approve of every word you have uttered, dearest Irene," returned Theodore. "Otto, henceforth we are brothers—and Irene will be your sister!"

The artist pressed the hands that were extended towards him; but his heart was too full to allow his tongue to give utterance to a reply.

The mountaineers now spread the contents of their wallets upon the table; fresh logs were thrown on the fire; and the entire party sat down to a cheerful repast.

### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### A SCENE IN THE CZERNIN MANSION.

Two months had elapsed since the incidents just related.

Ida was seated in her own chamber, in the Czernin palace at Vienna, pondering upon the various schemes and projects which she nourished in her bosom.

It was evening; and a lamp stood on the table whereon her elbow rested—her head supported by her hand in a musing attitude.

Suddenly the door opened; and her husband entered the apartment. At the first glance, she observed that he had not failed, as was his habit, to address himself pretty deeply to the wine-stoup.

"Wherefore have you left your drunken orgies with your friend Schurmann?" demanded Ida, her lip curling contemptuously. "Have you become wearied of his delectable society at length? Methinks that for the few months past, during which he has taken up his abode in this mansion—acting more as its master than yourself—"

"Cease prating, Ida, in this style," cried her husband, impatiently. "Remember our agreement the last time we had any words on this subject—that you were to act as you thought proper on your side, and I on mine. Let us adhere to those conditions; nothing is more fair or honourable."

"Then wherefore do you intrude upon my privacy?" demanded Ida, haughtily.

"Because I have something to say to you—something of consequence,"—and he took a seat. "The truth is, Schurmann has suddenly conceived a violent affection for you—"

"For me!—that vulgar menial!" ejaculated Ida, the blood rushing to her cheeks.

"Yes,—for you. And why not? Schurmann is a man of great taste; and although he certainly might be a little more polished,—and a little better looking—"

"Cease this idle nonsense! It cannot be to sing Messer Schurmann's praises in my ears, or to plead his suit for him, that you have sought my chamber?"

"Aye—but it is, though!" exclaimed her husband. "He is deeply enamoured of you, and insists upon seeing more of you. He requires that you preside at the ban-

queting-table, as a lady ought, in her husband's own hall; and I am come to conduct you to your place at the board."

"I would sooner partake of a crust of bread with the menials in their own apartment, than feast on luxuries at the same table with that horrible Schurmann," answered Ida, in a resolute tone.

"This is unreasonable. He is my friend: and what the devil have I got a wife for, if not to do her duty?"

"Ours was not an union based on the usual conventions, my lord," said Ida. "You required gold—I needed a home where I should be my own mistress, and at the same time possess an ostensible protector," she added emphatically. "You have been well supplied with the attractive metal, which you squander to your heart's delight, and in the most degrading manner; but you do not permit me that freedom on which I reckoned. You bring into the house a ruffian, who does nothing but drink, swear, and quarrel with the domestics all day long. If I remonstrate, you throw in my teeth a deed to which you also were privy; you menace—you threaten. And now you come to annoy me with fresh impertinences on the part of this Messer Schurmann."

"I come to ask you to preside at your own table. Schurmann desires it."

"And I refuse to comply."

"You will only irritate him; and—"

"And he will threaten you, as he has oft-times done before. But with your lordship's affairs I am to have no concern," added Ida, sarcastically. "Whether you have committed some crime which places you in this man's power—or whether he is acquainted with some strange secret which you would gladly have concealed—"

"All this reasoning is of no avail," interrupted her husband, stamping his foot violently on the floor.

"Not in the least!" interrupted Schurmann, bursting into the room. "Ha! ha! you little thought that I followed you to this pretty nest, where dwells a pretty bird—though somewhat of the most self-willed, I trow. But I have so often spoken to you on this same subject, and you have put me off with so many promises that your lady would join us next day—and the next—and so on; and as that day never came, but was always buried in the future, I thought I should do well to satisfy myself on this occasion how you acquitted yourself."

"And your insolence is now carried to such a pitch," exclaimed Ida, "that even my own chamber is not sacred in your eyes!"

"Pooh! pooh! no such thing as anything sacred in my eyes!" cried Schurmann. "Besides—it is just as well to overhear a secret or two now and then; and I have not listened without avail at your door for the last quarter of an hour."

"Villain!" ejaculated Ida, unable to restrain her wrath.

"Villain indeed!" repeated Schurmann, coolly. "So yours was a singular marriage—was it? Gold for the Baron—the name of a wife for you! And then that deed, to which his lordship was also privy! Why—I have learnt enough to enable me to crush your haughty spirit, my pretty bird, and make you fall at the feet of the vulgar menial Schurmann—without even exercising any other means that are in my power. Baron, leave us—I wish to say two or three words to her ladyship here."

"Quit not this room, my lord!" almost screamed Ida. "Compel me not to summon the household to my assistance—which I will do, at any sacrifice, if that monster dare approach me!"

"Baron—leave us, I say!" thundered Schurmann.

"I cannot—I will not," returned Ida's husband.

"Then, by heaven! I'll force you, fool!" said Schurmann, drawing his sword.

"It may as well come to this now as later," grumbled the self-styled Baron, also drawing his weapon. "Hark ye, Schurmann—I am tired of you: your constant insolence—your menaces—your reckless talk before the servants, keep me in perpetual suspense and misery. Now let the matter come to an issue. Defend yourself!"

And their swords instantly clashed.

Ida screamed, and was precipitating herself towards the door, when it was hastily opened, and Gertrude made her appearance.

The two men dropped the points of their swords, and almost simultaneously returned the weapons to their sheaths.

"My lord," said Gertrude, starting back with surprise, and scarcely able to give utterance to a word.

"Speak, girl," exclaimed Ida: "what brings you hither?"

"A person wishes to see his lordship."

"Did I not give orders that I would not be disturbed this evening?" demanded the self-styled Baron, angrily.

"But this person says he knows your lordship will see him," added Gertrude; "especially when I mention his name to your lordship."

"And that name?" demanded the false nobleman, impatiently.

"Fritz," was the answer.

"Fritz!" ejaculated Ida's husband, turning pale. "Yes—I will see him—this moment," he added, moving towards the door; then, in a lower tone, he murmured, "What can have brought Fritz hither?"

"And I will accompany you," exclaimed Schurmann; "although for the life of me I can't comprehend what this means."

They then left the room together.

In an apartment on the ground-floor, to which he had been shown, Fritz was pacing backwards and forwards in an agitated manner. The door shortly opened, and the fictitious nobleman, followed by his friend Schurmann, made his appearance.

"The game is up—the bird has flown!" said Fritz, advancing to meet Ida's husband.

Ejaculations of terror and surprise from the lips of him whom Fritz thus addressed, and with whom the old mountaineer seemed perfectly acquainted, were the only answers to this astounding communication.

"Yes," continued Fritz; "the real Baron has made his escape; and Father Anselm was nearly killed by the young fellow who managed the whole business, and who, by all I could learn, must be Otto Pianalla."

"Otto Pianalla!" exclaimed the false Baron.

"Yes: he visited the convent, in a certain manner, one day; and by the description the Superior, whom he mauled and gagged most unmercifully,—and who, by the bye, has come to Vienna also,—gave me of the person that released the Baron, it can be no other than Otto."

"I see that all is lost!" cried Schurmann; "and as I shall get nothing more here, I may as well shift for myself elsewhere."

With these words he rushed to the door; but on flinging it open, he nearly dashed Ida upon the stone floor of the hall!

"What—listeners?" cried Schurmann, seizing her by the arm, and dragging her into the room.

"Yourself taught me that lesson," answered Ida, forcibly disengaging herself from his grasp. "I have overheard all that has been said. What means that phrase 'the real Baron'? what has my brother Otto done? whom has he released? Speak!" she cried, raising her voice, and addressing herself to Fritz.

"Ah! ah!" chuckled Schurmann; "the game is all up now—and therefore your *ladyship* may as well know the worst. The truth is that your beloved husband—my particular friend there—is no more a Baron than I am—but simple Gregory Walstein, the real lord's most respectable companion at the Turkish galleys."

"Oh! this is too much!" screamed Ida, sinking upon a sofa, and covering her face with her hands.

At that instant the door was thrown open, and the room was filled with the archers of the guard.

"In the name of his Imperial Majesty, you are my prisoner!" said an officer, advancing towards the fictitious Baron.

Rapid as a spirit, Ida sprang to the door, and placing her back against it, exclaimed, "Whatever crimes my husband may have perpetrated, this man," pointing to Schurmann, "is an accomplice. Secure him also!"

And, as the guards laid hands upon that individual, Ida darted on him a malignant glance of triumph.

"Perhaps you, also, may have some concern in the conspiracy which has just been brought to light," said the officer, turning towards Fritz. "At all events, you must come with me, until you give a satisfactory account of yourself."

"And why not that woman, too?" cried Schurmann, indicating Ida. "She was as well aware of her husband's conduct as any of us; and, for my part, I had no hand—"

"I have no instructions to include any female in my present measures," said the officer.

"But she has committed some other crime—I overheard her talking of it with her husband," persisted Schurmann.

For a moment Ida trembled.

"What was the nature of that crime?" demanded the officer.

"I do not know—but it was something heinous, I feel convinced."

"The charge is too vague, and I cannot act upon it," returned the officer. "Come, my men—move off with your prisoners."

Schurmann was conducted away first; and as he passed Ida, she threw upon him another look of spiteful triumph. She was now revenged for all the insults he had heaped upon her; and so strangely constituted was her mind, that this gratification essentially mitigated the sense of degradation and disgrace which she experienced at the exposure of her husband's true condition and the idea of having married an impostor.

Fritz was next led away from the room; and Gregory Walstein—for we must now give him his real name—passed out last.

He kept his eyes fixed upon the ground, as he moved towards the door; and Ida, on her part, turned away from him with ineffable disgust.

As Gregory Walstein issued from that house where he had long ruled as a master, a lady, closely muffled in a dark veil, and on the middle finger of whose right hand was a ring of most singular workmanship, passed rapidly by him, and said in a hurried whisper, "Fear not! My brother Cæsar and Father Anselm are both in Vienna!"

"Did that lady speak to you?" demanded one of the guards.

"No," answered Walstein, boldly.

But that mysterious whisper had encouraged hope in the impostor's breast.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE HISTORY OF THEODORE VON CZERNIN.

On the following morning—namely, the 9th of June, 1466—the principal tribunal of Vienna presented a solemn, and yet, in one respect, a gay appearance.

Seated on the platform, beneath a blue velvet canopy with gold fringes, were the three judges; the President, Count Konigsen, occupying the central arm-chair. A few feet in front of the platform, or dais, an iron bar, breast high, extended from one side of the court to the other; and to this three prisoners were fasted by manacles on their left hands.

Those men were Gregory Walstein, Fritz, and Schurmann.

In a species of large pew, or witness-box, on the right of the judicial bench, and within the bar, sat Theodore von Czernin, Otto Pianalla, Mazzini, and Dame Miledreda.

The body of the court was crowded with spectators. The sudden arrest of him who had so long been considered the rightful Baron of Czernin, and rumours of the strange imposture which he had practised, had produced an extraordinary sensation in the capital. The audience consisted almost entirely of the wealthy and aristocratic classes, because, the proceedings of the tribunal not being open to the public, those only could obtain admission who possessed some interest with the judges.

Ida was not present; but the Count of Aurana occupied a front seat in the gallery. In another part of the court was a lady closely veiled, and attended by a handsome girl, whose dark complexion and large black eyes proclaimed her Italian origin. The former was Irene, now Baroness of Czernin; and the latter was Nina Mazzini. Lastly—of those to whom it is necessary to direct special attention—in a corner of the gallery, far removed from the place which Faust occupied, was a lady, whose elegant figure was not concealed by the thick black veil which was thrown over her head, and whose folds fell like a dark mantle around her. Once a delicate white hand, on the middle finger of which was a ring of singular workmanship, was thrust forth beneath the veil, in order to arrange its folds more completely over her countenance; and this movement happened to be observed by Faust.

The extraordinary resemblance existing between the Baron of Czernin and the prisoner Gregory was the subject of general observation. The Baron was clad in a garb befitting his rank; and, although the spectators were struck by that marvellous external similitude, yet none failed to mark the discrepancy of bearing, gentility, and manner which existed between the true noble and the impostor. Moreover—while these two individuals were characterized by hair of precisely the same hue, eyes of the same colour, and facial lines precisely corresponding—there was a coarseness in the features, and a vulgarity in the expression of the impostor's countenance, which were strikingly contrasted by the refinement and stamp of high birth which were depicted on that of Theodore von Czernin. The height of the two forms was exactly

the same; and it was evident that their figures must have once worn the appearance of having been cast in the same mould; but that of the impostor was now corpulent, bulky, and unwieldy, while that of the Baron was graceful, yet commanding—symmetrical, yet indicative of great physical strength.

In a word, it was easy for the impostor to have enacted the part of Baron of Czernin while the real owner of that title was absent; but now that they were placed, as it were, in juxtaposition, no one could have hesitated how to answer the question, "Which is the true Baron of Czernin?"

And now the proceedings of the court commenced.

The president called upon Theodore von Czernin to state the particulars of his accusation against the three prisoners.

"My lord," answered the Baron, rising from his seat, "although I am well aware that the time of the tribunal is most precious—still, as I am here not only to maintain grave charges against the three prisoners, but also to demonstrate my own rights and titles, which have been usurped by an impostor, it will be necessary for me to enter upon a complete narrative of my existence since I quitted Vienna, in the year 1479."

"Speak freely," said the judge. "The tribunal will listen with that attention which is due to so important a subject."

The Baron bowed, and commenced his history in the following manner:—

"It was in the year 1478 that I attained the age of twenty-three—the period when the vast fortune, which the generosity of a deceased parent had left me, became my own. Shortly afterwards, the death of an uncle increased my possessions; and I found myself wealthy beyond all my former expectations, and certainly beyond my ambition. I had long cherished a desire to travel in the East, and to contemplate the manners and customs of that extraordinary nation, which, springing from an obscure tribe that dwelt upon the slopes of Mount Olympus, spread its conquests with such rapidity as to seize upon old Byzantium as its capital, and extended its possessions even to the very frontiers of Austria and Hungary. Yes—I longed to travel in the Ottoman empire; and so soon as I had laid aside the mourning which I wore for my deceased uncle, and could put my affairs in proper order, I set out, attended by six faithful dependents. The journey commenced in January, 1479, and, as I was the master of my time, I proceeded by easy stages. I shall not, however, take up your lordships' time by any unnecessary details of the adventures which I experienced, or the perils through which I passed, during my wanderings. Be it sufficient to state that, having visited all the remarkable places in the principalities of Servia, Moldavia, and Wallachia, at the hands of whose reigning hospodars and waiwodes I experienced much hospitality, I pushed onward through the vast territory of Roumelia, to Constantinople. There I remained some months, and then crossed the Bosphorus into Anatolia. I visited Brusa—the burial-place of the early Ottoman Sultans—traversed Caramania, and entered Syria. Two years had already passed; and in the beginning of 1481 I found myself crossing the desert, attended by my faithful dependents, and escorted by a hired troop of twenty light infantry soldiers, or Akindji, furnished me by the Egyptian Governor of Aleppo.\*

"It was in the neighbourhood of Damascus that an incident occurred, which, in more ways than one, has since exercised a material influence upon my destinies. We were within sight of the peerless capital of the province, when we were suddenly attacked by a horde of banditti, numbering at least sixty well-armed men. On our side we made a desperate defence; but we were overpowered by numerical force. My six attendants were all slain, and more than half of the Akindji were stretched lifeless upon the sand. At that perilous crisis, succour arrived. A merchant, well-known in the East by the honoured name of Demetrius Notaras, appeared on the scene of battle, followed by a large escort. The banditti were compelled to take to flight, ere they had entered on the work of plunder; and the merchant had me conveyed to his own house in the city. I was sorely wounded; but an angel—his daughter—tended me with a sister's devotion. I gradually recovered; but more rapidly than my advance towards convalescence was the progress of that profound attachment which I conceived for the charming Irene.

My passion was reciprocated; Demetrius Notaras gave his consent to our union, and no obstacle appeared to stand in the way of our happiness. I was wealthy; my possessions in my native land were immense; and I had jewels of great value about me. The merchant was also rich; Irene was an only daughter, and the heiress of all her father's property. Thus every circumstance—whether considered in reference to sentiment, or in a worldly point of view—was favourable to our hopes.

"One evening—the very one before the day fixed for our nuptials—I parted with Irene, for the purpose of visiting the goldsmiths' bazaar, and exchanging some of my heavy German jewellery for lighter articles, better adapted for the female toilette, as I was anxious to make my intended bride a befitting present on the happy morning. I reached the bazaar, completed my business, and hastened to retrace my steps towards the merchant's dwelling. It was now quite dark; and I was threading my way along a gloomy, narrow, and lonely street, when a shawl was suddenly thrown over my head, and drawn so tightly round my month that utterance was impossible. Almost at the same instant my arms were bound, and two men, lifting me between them, hurried me away at a rapid pace. In this manner we proceeded, for at least half an hour, while a sense of increasing strangulation nearly deprived me of my senses. At length I was deposited upon the ground; the shawl was removed from my face; and I found myself without the walls of the city, in the power of half a dozen well-armed ruffians. I was placed on horseback; the others had also steeds in readiness; and the party galloped away from the neighbourhood of Damascus at full speed. We journeyed thus for two hours, and then stopped at a cave in a vast mound of sand as hard as a rock. There I discovered the fate that was in store for me. By a strange coincidence the captain of the very horde of banditti, which had formerly attacked me and killed my attendants, on the occasion when Demetrius Notaras rescued me from their power, was in the bazaar at the moment that I made my purchases. He instantly recognised me, and followed me with one of his band who was with him. As soon as we reached the cave, my garments were rifled, and the jewels which I had purchased were taken from me. But the robbers little suspected that several costly articles, which I had brought from Germany with me, were concealed in a belt that I wore round my waist beneath my clothes.

"I implored them to allow me to return to Damascus; and I promised them a large sum by way of ransom, which should be paid the moment I could communicate with the merchant. But they turned a deaf ear to my prayers; and on the following morning I was compelled to accompany them towards the sea-coast. I need not attempt to depict my grief at this sudden separation from Irene: everyone who now hears me must comprehend how profound was my sorrow—how acute the anguish of my mind. In a few days we reached the sea-side; and there the banditti sold me as a slave to a Tunisian corsair, whose vessel was lying in a secluded bay. The ship sailed almost immediately; but in the evening it fell in with a galley belonging to the squadron of the Capitan-Pasha—the High Admiral of the Ottoman fleets. The pirate vessel was captured; the corsair chief was hanged; and all the crew, including myself, were sent on board the admiral's ship, where we were chained as slaves to the benches, and forced to ply the oars. I solicited an interview with the Capitan-Pasha, and represented to him my name, social position, and misfortunes. But this was of no avail; for war had just broken out between the Sublime Porte and the German empire; and I was therefore retained as a prisoner, and treated as a slave. But through all these vicissitudes I contrived to keep my remaining jewels safely about my person; for the Turks could not do otherwise than imagine that the Egyptian banditti had so thoroughly stripped me of every valuable as to render any further search about my person utterly useless.

"My condition was now wretched indeed. Chained to a bench, whereon I had to toil by day, and which was my only bed by night—subject to the cruelty of an officer, who went about amongst the slaves, armed with a whip possessing seven lashes knotted with small pieces of lead—exposed to the insults of the ruffians who were my companions in captivity, and who seemed to be the refuse of all nations—fed upon offal of the most disgusting description, and forced to assuage a burning thirst with water so filthy that the stomach loathed it, and tormented by the constant thought that Irene must either deem me faithless to my solemn vows, or consider me to be no longer

\* Syria was not at this period under the dominion of the Ottomans. It belonged to the Mameluke or Egyptian empire.

amongst the living; I often prayed for death to release me from my misery.

"I had been a year in this horrible captivity, when an engagement took place in the waters of Candia between the Ottoman and the Venetian fleets; for the great Republic had espoused the cause of Germany and of Christendom against the barbarism of the East. The Christians were, however, vanquished; and nearly all their ships were captured. Then fresh slaves were poured into the Ottoman vessels; and two Germans, who had been taken prisoners on board a Venetian galley, were sent to be my companions on my bench in the admiral's ship. These men were two of the prisoners now at the bar—Gregory Walstein and Schurmann. The moment Gregory and myself thus met, we were astonished at the marvellous resemblance which existed between us; and perhaps this circumstance—as well as the satisfaction I experienced in obtaining the society of two comrades of my own country—induced me in time to open my heart to both, but especially to Walstein. We had ample leisure for conversation; and it was our principal source of comfort to talk of our native land—that land which we so fondly hoped some day to behold again. As time wore on, I communicated all my secrets to Walstein. I gave him an accurate description of my possessions in Germany, enumerated my farms, named my tenants, and explained to him all the particulars of my past life. I also acquainted him with my love for Irene, and the cruel manner in which I had been separated from her. In a word, our only solace was to converse upon our own affairs together; and we soon became as intimate as two brothers. Neither of us, however, admitted Schurmann within the same range of friendship: we treated him as a fellow Christian in captivity; but we did not impart to him all those secrets which we confided to each other.

"Walstein candidly informed me that he was a man of broken fortunes when he was taken prisoner. He had passed some years in Italy, but had ruined himself by gambling and dissipation. He then accepted employment as an agent of the Secret Tribunal of Germany, and was despatched for certain purposes, which he was bound by oath not to reveal, on board a ship of the Venetian fleet. He seemed deeply to deplore his former evil ways, and expressed himself with so much contrition, that I promised—if ever we obtained our pardon—to supply him with the means of retrieving his character, and earning an honourable livelihood. Such confidence did I place in him, that I communicated my secret of the jewels concealed about my person—a fact which we both religiously kept from Schurmann, whom we mistrusted.

"Year after year passed away—year after year of miserable captivity, each day witnessing despair taking deeper hold in our hearts. I will not dwell on all the miseries which we endured; those present can readily imagine the atrocious treatment of a Turkish galley. At length, in the year 1488, deliverance came—suddenly, and most unexpectedly. We had been transferred from the admiral's ship to a smaller vessel, which was ordered to cruise off the Morea. One morning we encountered a Venetian ship in the waters of Cephalonia; and, after three hours' hard fighting, the Christian vessel compelled the Ottoman galley to strike its flag. An immediate release followed; and we were conveyed on board the Venetian ship, where I received the utmost attention from the captain, to whom I mentioned my name and rank. My influence also procured the same good treatment for Walstein and Schurmann. The vessel sailed for Venice, with its prize; and in due time we reached the great sea-girt city of the Republic.

"I now determined to repair to Vienna without delay, attend to my affairs (which, I feared, might have become deranged during my absence of nine years), and immediately adopt measures to communicate with Irene. I realized a small portion of my jewellery at Venice, and proposed to my two comrades to accompany me. Schurmann, however, had reasons of his own for remaining at Venice; I accordingly gave him a sum of money to enable him to commence another start in life; and Walstein readily consented to be my companion.

"But I was not destined to leave Venice without an adventure, which I must relate with some details. I was rambling alone in the evening—the one before the day fixed for the return of myself and Walstein into Germany—amongst the principal streets of Venice, admiring the magnificence of the buildings and the splendour of the shops, when it suddenly struck me that Walstein, whom I had left at the hotel where we were lodging, to prepare for the morrow's journey, had just passed me and entered a handsome house, the gate of which was standing open.

This incident appeared to me singular, because he had previously intimated his intention of remaining at the hotel all the evening; and, as my misfortunes had rendered me suspicious, I felt annoyed at this duplicity on his part, supposing that it was really Walstein whom I had seen enter the mansion. While I was standing at the gate, meditating upon the occurrence, loud screams, as of a female in distress, emanated from the house. Without a moment's hesitation I rushed into the building, and hastened up a wide staircase on my right hand. The screams continued; I entered a corridor in the direction from which they seemed to come. The passage was nearly dark, but I could distinguish several doors, all closed, on either side. The screams appeared to come from a room at the farther end. I hurried, and opened a door at the end of the corridor, holding my drawn sword in my hand. No one was there; and the screams had suddenly ceased. But so singular were the contents of the room in which I found myself, that I could not help tarrying for a few moments to contemplate the objects that met my view.

"The room was spacious and handsome, but contained little furniture. It was lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling. On the table stood two or three glass jars, containing a kind of white meal, and labelled '*Cantarella*.' Near them were four or five phials, filled with a white liquid, like foam, and labelled '*Aqua Cantarella*.' In one corner of the room a huge bear was suspended by the feet to a hook in the ceiling. The animal was dead; and on the floor, immediately under it, was a silver dish, containing a quantity of the same kind of foaming liquid, which I had seen in the phials, and which had been discharged from the bear's throat, drops still falling from its open mouth. But this room contained another object equally remarkable. Fastened by the legs to four posts, which were erected in the apartment, a bull lay upon his back. It was dead, an incision, about two feet in length, had been made in its stomach, whence the intestines had been taken; the floor in the immediate vicinity of the animal was marked with the imprints of human feet, naked—those imprints being stamped in blood! These traces were continued to the side of a bed in the neighbouring corner of the apartment; and the sheets were saturated with gore.

"While I was yet lost in astonishment at the contemplation of these most extraordinary objects, which, in some respects, rather reminded me of a butcher's slaughter-house than a room in a handsome palazzo, I heard footsteps behind me. Turning hastily round, I beheld a young and beautiful woman; and at the same instant my eyes caught a glimpse of the retreating figure of a man. But that man! I felt convinced he was none other than Walstein. The lady—who was elegantly dressed, and certainly the loveliest woman, save one, that I had ever seen in my life—advanced towards me, and said, '*What means this intrusion?*' I explained to her the circumstances which had brought me thither. She cast upon me a glance that seemed meant to read the secrets of the soul; and then, in an imperious tone, demanded my name. '*I am the Baron of Czermin*,' was my answer; '*but as I am considered an intruder, signora, I will immediately retire.*'—'*You will do well, my lord, to leave this place no wiser than when you entered it!*' she said, in a deeply impressive tone, casting, at the same time, a significant glance around the room. '*I mean*,' she added, '*beware how you ever breathe a word of those things which you have thus accidentally seen.*' She then waved her hand in an imperious manner, and I immediately withdrew. I may, however, mention that this lady wore upon the middle finger of her right hand a ring, with an ornament shaped like a lion's head, small, and of exquisite workmanship, with diamonds of immense value for the eyes.

"The moment I had gained the street, I hurried back to the hotel, anxious to satisfy myself whether the person whom I had twice taken for Walstein was really he or not. But on entering our apartment at the hotel, I found him sitting composedly near the table, on which stood a half-emptied flask of wine. I questioned him, but he assured me, in the most positive terms, that he had not quitted the hotel during the evening. I was staggered; but he spoke with so much assurance, that I was compelled to believe him. I then related all I had seen in the strange mansion. He asked me if I had thought of inquiring to whom the house belonged. I confessed that I had not, and he immediately offered to accompany me into the neighbourhood, to ascertain the point. I was, however, weary, and my curiosity was absorbed in the contemplation of my own affairs. I ac-



cordingly declined the proposal, and retired to my chamber.

"Early in the morning Walstein and myself embarked in a gondola, and were ferried over to the continent. There we were joined by three armed men, whom Walstein had already hired to escort us, the north of Italy being then, as now, infested with banditti. We pursued our journey, and in a few days entered the defiles of the Julian Alps, which we intended to cross into Carniola. But we had not proceeded far, when the villany of my companions demonstrated itself. The three armed men were named Fritz, Karl, and Conrade; Fritz, the leader of the others, stands, my lords, before you! We had reached a hut, where I proposed to pass the night; but no sooner had sleep overtaken me, when I was bound, plundered of my remaining jewels, and borne away to that convent where I since languished eight years.

"I was imprisoned in a covered court, at one end of which was a wall, with a huge door, in which there was a *guichet*. The *guichet* was usually kept locked; but on several occasions the negligence of my guards left it unfastened. There would I stand for hours, gazing through that opening upon the defile, without dreaming of that liberty of which it seemed I was to be deprived for ever! Six years ago I saw a man in the defile, and I implored him to save me. But my guards were within hearing, and sallying out, they made that person their prisoner. He is now here," continued the Baron, turning towards Mazzini, "and can tell you how he was treated by those who captured him. Time wore on: and at distant intervals I saw other travellers,—always singly,—in the defile; but either my appeals to them were unavailing, or my guards were near, and they were made prisoners. The treatment they experienced may be judged from that which Mazzini and another," said the Baron, glancing towards Otto, "met with in the same place. At length this generous young man," and the Baron again indicated Pianalla with a look, "appeared in the defile,—an event which led to my deliverance.

"But, in the meantime, my existence was miserable during the long and tedious period of eight years. I never saw Walstein from the moment he betrayed me into captivity until this morning; but there was one in the convent who persecuted me during the first two or three years of my captivity to assign over to him the whole of my possessions. This man was the Superior,—Father Anselm. I consented to divide my fortune with him as the price of my freedom; but he refused the terms. At length, when,—wearied with protracted confinement, and ever anxious to communicate with the Lady Notaras at Damascus,—I assented to Anselm's conditions, I learnt that I must remain in custody until the transfers were fully completed, beyond reservation, by the Superior's agents in Vienna. I immediately suspected treachery. He who was vile enough to retain an innocent man in captivity, would not hesitate, I thought, to keep me still a prisoner, even after I had surrendered all my wealth. Moreover, I felt persuaded that the idea of my freedom on such terms was a mere chimera, as by releasing me, after the total consummation of his wickedness, the Superior would only be endangering himself, in case I should appeal to the justice of my country's tribunals. I therefore indignantly refused to accede to the conditions proposed; and during the last four or five years of my captivity, I heard no more of the terms with which the Superior had previously sought to coerce me into the renunciation of my property.

"Alas! it appears that more effectual means have been taken to acquire those vast estates—that princely fortune! By means of the secrets and detailed information he had gleaned from me in the Turkish galley—by the possession of the jewels of which he plundered me in the Julian Alps—and by the aid of that striking personal similarity which exists between us—that detestable impostor," added the Baron, pointing towards Gregory Walstein, who quailed beneath the indignant glance of the man whom he had so foully wronged—"that detestable impostor, I say, has obtained possession of my rank and property.

"My lords, I have now concluded this sad narrative. Whether my captivity originated in that adventure which befell me at Venice, or whether it was merely the result of the villany of the impostor now trembling before you, I cannot determine. The wisdom of this tribunal will no doubt penetrate that mystery.

"For the loss of my property I am consoled by the admirable conduct of that amiable and devoted lady who is now the Baroness of Czernin. Her wealth—which is

far greater than the fortune I have lost—is more than ample to insure our happiness and prosperity. But justice—an outraged society—and my own deep wrongs, demand the punishment of Fritz and Gregory Walstein."

"Your lordship has, then, no charge to prefer against the prisoner Schurmann?" said the president, when the sensation produced by this extraordinary narrative had in some degree subsided.

"None, my lord," was the reply.

"Then Schurmann is free," said the chief judge. "Gregory Walstein and Fritz must be conducted back to confinement. The proceedings are adjourned until to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XLV.

### WHO IS SHE?

THE narrative of the Baron of Czernin had produced an extraordinary sensation in the minds of all who heard it, as we have said above. The adventure in Venice was of so profoundly mysterious and dark a nature as to defy conjecture; and yet everyone more or less connected it with the rigorous captivity which the Baron had endured in the convent.

The moment the day's proceedings were over, Count Konigsen, the Chief Judge, repaired straight to the imperial palace, and related to the Emperor the particulars of the Baron of Czernin's history.

Maximilian was generous and liberal. He immediately confirmed the Baron in his title and dignity, and ordered a handsome income to be settled upon him from the Imperial Treasury. His Majesty then despatched a special courier to the governor of Laybach, in Carniola, with instructions to adopt immediate measures for the military occupation of the Capuchins' Convent in the Julian Alps. The despatches to that authority contained a plan of the exact position of the convent, with its three avenues of approach, the map having been carefully prepared for the purpose by Otto Pianalla.

The President of the Tribunal then withdrew from the imperial presence, and proceeded to the mansion in which the Baron of Czernin and Irene had taken up their abode, and where Otto Pianalla, Mazzini, and Nina were honoured guests. They were all delighted at the tokens of imperial favour manifested towards the Baron, and were scarcely less gratified with the intelligence that measures had been already adopted to crush the nest of vipers cradled in the wilds of the Julian Alps.

Having hastily referred to these matters, which it was necessary to relate for several reasons, we must return to the moment when the proceedings in the tribunal closed for the day.

The two prisoners were removed—Schurmann was set at liberty—and the crowds poured from the body of the court. The veiled lady, with the peculiar ring upon her finger, did not, however, immediately rise to depart. She seemed to linger until the pressure of the multitude should have subsided. Such was, indeed, her intention; and so soon as the audience had dispersed, she left the gallery.

Having issued from the court, she struck into one of the narrowest and least frequented of those streets which radiated towards the area where the tribunal stood. Her pace was hurried, and to the acute observer bespoke some agitation of manner on her part.

All this was not unobserved by Faust, who had been narrowly watching her from the moment when the Baron had narrated his Venetian adventure.

It was now nearly dark; and the lady was pursuing her way, unconscious of having attracted any particular attention. There was, however, light enough to enable Faust to distinguish the delicacy of the feet which tripped so lightly along, and to mark with admiration the faultless contours of that form which the dark veil could not conceal.

Suddenly the lady felt a gentle tap upon the shoulder; and at the same instant a voice said in her ear, "You are alone, and the streets of Vienna are not well guarded by night. Permit me to escort you to your destination."

"I am more afraid of the rudeness of obtrusive cavaliers and gallants, than of the aggression of robbers."

Such was the reply which the lady gave; and, although her manner and tone were alike haughty and imperious, still they could not impair the soft melody of her voice.

"Nay, lady, reject not my offer, which was meant in all befitting courtesy," said Faust. "You come from the tribunal, where I also have been a listener to a wondrous tale, not the least interesting portion of which," he added, significantly, "was the Venetian episode."

"Ah! what mean you, sir?" exclaimed the lady; then, instantly composing herself, she said, "The episode to which you allude savoured rather of a romance than of an incident of real life."

"Yes, lady, were I not aware that it is no romance, I might partake the scepticism which you, however, only affect," returned Faust.

"Your words are rude, sir," replied the lady. "Which way lies your path? Because mine will be in the opposite direction."

"I cannot permit you to traverse these streets alone," persisted Faust. "Moreover, I feel an interest in conversing with you. Perhaps you may know me by name. I am the Count of Aurana."

"Ah!" ejaculated the lady. "Then you were interested to some extent in the proceedings of this day?"

"In what manner, lady?" demanded Faust.

"Is not the impostor's life in danger, and does not his disgrace in some degree affect your lordship's paramour, the beautiful Ida?" asked the lady, in calm and measured terms—the German language in her mouth receiving an inexpressible charm from the soft Italian tones in which it was uttered.

"You have spoken boldly, lady, thus to allude to the fame of Ida—whom, perhaps, you do not know," said Faust. "But I understand it all now," he added, a light breaking in upon his mind. "You are acquainted with Gregory Walstein? Yes—there can be no doubt of that. And he has revealed to you secrets which he had better have retained in his own breast."

"No matter whence I derived my information," said the lady, with a gentle laugh. "You acknowledge that it is correct?"

"And you on your part, lady," retorted Faust, "must admit that the Venetian adventure of the Baron of Czernin might receive full corroboration from your lips. The ring upon your finger is fashioned with a lion's head."

"Nay—you err, my lord," exclaimed the lady, laughing slightly again. "See—it has the head of a viper."

As she spoke, she approached a window, whence shone a flood of light; and holding up her exquisitely modelled hand, displayed upon the taper finger a ring of the form which she described.

"This is certainly a viper's head," observed Faust. "But the other may be about your person."

"I swear most solemnly that I have worn no other ring than this throughout the day—that I have no other concealed about my person," returned the lady, emphatically; and she moved on, Faust still walking by her side.

"It were but little courteous in me to dispute with you relative to the fashion of a ring," continued the Count of Aurana. "Albeit, I could swear as positively as yourself that you wore one with a lion's head, wherein diamonds of costly price represented eyes, this morning in the gallery of the judgment-hall."

"As your lordship says, we need not dispute concerning a ring," exclaimed the lady. "And now—since you have persisted in forming my acquaintance—allow me ask what course your lordship intends to pursue with reference to Gregory Walstein?"

"Wherefore do you ask, lady? Are you, then, really interested in that man? Ida wished me to abandon him to his fate—since he could only live in disgrace, were he saved."

"Your lordship admits, then, that you possess the power to save him?" said the lady, rapidly.

"My words scarcely implied such a power on my part," observed Faust, smiling.

"Nay—you do not deny your ability to save Walstein," continued the lady; then, stopping short, she said, in an earnest manner, "If you do possess that power, my lord, use it—exercise it; and you will render me your debtor."

"I would do much to serve one so beautiful—so fascinating as you, lady; but—"

"How know you that I am beautiful?" she asked.

"Did not the Baron declare that the lady whom he met in the mansion at Venice was the most lovely woman he had ever seen, save one?—and that one meant the Lady Irene."

"You persist in identifying me with the heroine of his Venetian romance," said the lady. "And yet you have seen that the ring has no lion's head—but a viper's."

"True—it is a viper's now."

"And has a viper's fangs, too," added the lady, emphatically. "But let that pass. Are you disposed to serve me?—can you save Gregory Walstein?"

"Is it possible that you, lady, can experience any tender interest in a man of dissipated habits—vulgar manners—coarse mind?" demanded Faust.

"And is it possible that the Count of Aurana should be so little acquainted with the ways of the world as to imagine that love can be the only motive which may influence the proceedings of a woman?" asked the lady, in an imperious tone. "Believe me, my lord—I am of high birth: aye, and my father sits upon a throne, whence he is enabled to control the destinies not only of his own dominions, but of Christendom! Now, my lord, you can understand that if I ask much at your hands, it may be worth the while of even a powerful noble like you to win my favour."

"Beautiful—mysterious, unaccountable being!" exclaimed Faust, "how can I refuse your wishes? Yes, lady—I do possess the power of releasing Gregory Walstein. But I would rather earn a smile from your lips, and a glance from your lustrous eyes, than all the rewards which your rank, or your father's power, may be enabled to bestow. Indeed, lady," continued Faust, proudly, "I can safely declare—without idle boasting—that the wealth of no sovereign is equal to mine; and as for honours and titles—"

He checked himself, and laughed—almost scornfully—certainly with triumph, as if he would have added, "Those are also within my grasp—but I reckon not of them!"

There was a short pause in the conversation; and during that interval Faust and the mysterious lady were occupied with their own peculiar meditations.

"You say that you will serve me, my lord?" exclaimed the latter, suddenly pausing beneath another well-lighted window in the street which they were threading side by side. "Then behold my countenance—and these lips shall smile upon you, and these eyes express their gratitude, and more favour even will I show you, if you can release Fritz as well as Walstein."

Thus saying, she drew aside her veil, and revealed a countenance of dazzling beauty. The well-formed head was placed proudly upon a beautiful swan-like neck, which rose from sloping shoulders and a bust modelled in the most voluptuous mould. She appeared to be about twenty-eight years of age; and her eyes beamed with the passions of mature womanhood.

"Beautiful creature—however thou art—I can refuse thee nothing!" exclaimed Faust. "But, if I release both Fritz and this detestable impostor, Gregory Walstein—if I do thy bidding—may I not meet thee again, to hear from those sweet lips that you are satisfied with my endeavours to please thee?"

"Yes—we will meet again," answered the lady, replacing the veil, and continuing her way, still accompanied by Faust. "Let Fritz and Gregory Walstein be freed this night—this night, my lord—for to-morrow they would be put to the torture, and one or both might confess more than I choose them to reveal,—and to-morrow evening, at dusk, I will meet you on the southern rampart of the city. And now let us separate; we understand each other—the conditions are specific."

"Adieu, fair one," said Faust. "To-morrow evening we shall meet on the southern rampart."

He then turned and retraced his steps, while the mysterious lady pursued her way.

But, by a strange coincidence, Ida overheard the parting words of the Count of Aurana. She was on her way towards the city-gate communicating with the road leading to his mansion; for she wished to see him in consequence of the day's proceedings in the tribunal, an account of which had duly reached her. The moment she recognised his voice, and saw that he was with a female, she stepped into the deep recess of a doorway, and those words, "*To-morrow evening we shall meet on the southern rampart*," fell upon her ears. That was all she heard of her lover's dialogue with the veiled lady; but it was sufficient to arouse all the bitter and rancorous hatred of her envenomed mind. She knew that Faust was beyond the reach of her vengeance—that, until the completion of his term of twenty-four years, he bore a charmed life, inaccessible to either poison or dagger; but she resolved to wreak her revenge upon the female whom she immediately conceived to be her rival.

It must be observed that Ida merely overheard the words confirming the appointment between Faust and the lady, and that she was, therefore, totally unaware of the contemplated liberation of Gregory Walstein.

It was precisely upon this latter point that Ida had wished to consult Faust. The ambitious woman had all along aimed at becoming the Countess of Aurana, because she had hoped that, when once united to Faust, she should be enabled to induce him to invest himself with even higher titles—the glory of which she would share.

Hence her previous attempt upon the life of Theresa, for she had determined that, so soon as the Countess was removed from this mortal sphere, her own husband should not be long ere he also ceased to trouble her with his presence in this world. We have, however, seen how mysteriously her designs were frustrated by the antidote administered through Pianalla's agency to Theresa, and by the death of the poison-vender.

Now Ida was balancing between the idea of abandoning her husband to his fate, and the dread that he might reveal a circumstance materially affecting herself. She wished to be rid of him, and she yet trembled for her secret. It was upon this point that she had been anxious to consult Faust, when she so strangely overheard the appointment he made with one whom she instantly conceived to be a rival paramour.

She paused—she reflected. Then she suddenly determined upon allowing her husband's affair to take its chance, for she felt persuaded that Faust would adopt some measure to seal the impostor's tongue in respect to the revelations which would not only compromise her in one particular way, but also proclaim the illicit amour which she had carried on with the Count of Aurana.

"Yes," she said, "Faust, for his own sake, will take care of that danger. Let me think only of vengeance against my rival!"

And with these words, she retraced her steps to the Czernin mansion, which she still occupied, although she was well aware that she should soon be compelled to surrender it to its rightful owner.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE FIVE INCIDENTS.

EARLY on the following morning strange rumours were current in the imperial city of Vienna.

The preceding night had been fertile in incidents of a character to supply the inhabitants with ample food for conversation, and to fill the authorities with dismay.

In the first place Fritz and Gregory Walstein had escaped from the dungeon in which they both were confined. Although heavily shackled and chained to the wall, they had rid themselves of both fetters and manacles; the door of their dungeon was forced open; and the iron bars were removed from a window in the corridor leading to their cell. But how they had escaped the vigilance of the sentinels in the street beneath, the authorities could not conceive. The fact was, however, too apparent: the prisoners had escaped!

The second incident was the assassination of the imperial courier, who had left Vienna on the preceding evening, charged with despatches for the governor of Laybach. The unfortunate man had been discovered in a wood, about five miles from the capital, stabbed to the heart with a dagger, the handle of which was surrounded with a cord—dread emblem of the vengeance of the Bloody League! To that cord was fastened a slip of paper, whereon the following words were written, and to which the usual symbolic signature of three daggers was appended:—

"Let all those who meditate mischief against the members of the Holy Vehm, take warning from the fate of this man! The Holy Vehm strikes alike them that plot evil designs against its authority, and them that bear the commands of those who so conspire."

"†††"

This courier's money and weapons were all safe about his person; but his despatches had disappeared.

The third incident—and the one which seemed to exceed the two first in actual audacity, although it was outdone by the second event in respect to criminality—was this:—When the Emperor Maximilian awoke in the morning, his eyes fell upon a dagger sticking in a table near his couch. The weapon had the cord twined round its handle; and a slip of parchment, fastened to it, contained the single but expressive word, "*Beware!*"

The fourth incident was a rumour that a man, who had been publicly executed, at least twenty-five years previously, had been seen in Vienna on the preceding evening. This was Ulric Kinis, the sentinel who had been bribed by the physician, on the occasion of the birth of the Archduke Leopold, in the memorable conspiracy relative to the change of infants in the Chamber of the Cradle. Two persons, who had been well acquainted with the Hungarian soldier, declared most solemnly that they had seen him, habited in the garb of a monk. One stated that he had met him in the neighbourhood of the tribunal,

shortly after sunset; and the other alleged that he had seen him leave one of the southern gates of the capital, an hour later. These two persons were unacquainted with each other, although they had both been on intimate terms with Ulric Kinis; and, consequently, there could be no possibility of collusion between them, for any particular purpose, in spreading such a report. They declared, that though time had greatly altered the Hungarian, yet such was the peculiar cast of his features, and the remarkable expression of his countenance, they had perfectly recollected him.

Still everyone, who was old enough to carry his reminiscences so far backward, was aware that Ulric Kinis, the physician, and the nurse (the physician's wife) had been hanged on the ramparts of the capital, and their bodies given over to the gaol-surgeon for dissection. These surgeons were now no more; but the possibility of Ulric Kinis being still in the land of the living was viewed with wonder and suspicion.

These four incidents—the escape of the prisoners, the assassination of the courier, the emblems of the Vehm in the imperial bed-chamber, and the reappearance of Ulric Kinis,—were, as we have already stated, subjects of serious comment on the part of the worthy inhabitants of Vienna, and of dismay to the authorities.

But the day was destined to close with another—a fifth incident, equally calculated to produce a deep impression throughout the capital.

A quarter of an hour before sunset, the veiled lady appeared upon the southern rampart of Vienna.

"I had some trouble to get quit of my brother Cæsar," she murmured to herself, as she arranged her veil with her delicate white hand, on the middle finger of which was the curious ring—now bearing the lion's head, as Faust had first seen it in the court on the previous day. "Cæsar is so suspicious," she continued, again concealing her hand beneath the dense veil: "but I was determined to keep my word with the Count of Aurana—he is so handsome! I have heard much of this nobleman. But of whom that is eminent for wealth, title, or singularity of character, do I not know much? With such means of procuring information at its command—with such connections—with such riches—with such power, as my family possesses,—what cannot we achieve? How vain—how futile are the machinations of my enemies! One by one they fall suddenly into the tomb—and no one, save ourselves, comprehends the mystery of their death! Oh! our name is great—aye, and terrible throughout the world! But this Faust—this Count of Aurana! He, too, must have his secret: else whence his sudden elevation—his boundless wealth—his vast influence? Whence that contempt for honours and titles—as if the world were within his grasp—as it soon shall be within that of my father? How astonished will he be when I tell him my name! Yes—I will reveal myself to him: he has served me well—and his disposition mates with mine. Cæsar will find him a valuable friend. With such an agent at the German court, our schemes would prosper grandly throughout this vast empire;—for it is not sufficient for our family to exercise dominion in Italy alone! No—the name of—"

The ambitious woman was so lost in her meditations that a cavalier with waving plume, and muffled in a cloak, was close to her, ere she was aware even of his approach.

"Faust," she murmured, in a low tone.

"No—not Faust, whom you expect, vile woman!" ejaculated Ida—for it was she, in male attire; "but one who loves Faust, and who cannot endure a rival!"

Thus saying, Ida precipitated herself upon the veiled lady, and aimed a desperate blow at her bosom with a long dagger which she held in her hand.

But the right arm of the infuriate woman was embarrassed with the folds of the cloak; and the lady also stepped a pace or two back at the moment the dagger was about to descend,—so that the aim was missed.

Ida instantly recovered herself, and was prepared to deal a second blow, when the veiled lady, quickly as thought, touched her ring, the lion's head of which instantly changed into the shape of a viper's. Then, catching Ida's arm with her left hand, and thus warding off the blow, the lady touched her assailant's cheek with the point of the viper's head.

All this was the work of a moment; and the lady again stepped a few paces backward.

Then she stood still—well aware that she was no longer in danger.

No—for the effect of the poisoned ring was instantaneous: Ida uttered a faint cry, and fell heavily upon the rampart—a corpse!

"I dare not meet the Count of Aurana now!" murmured the lady, turning hastily away.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## WHO IS HE?

SCARCELY had the veiled lady retreated twenty yards from the spot where Ida's death was effected in so strange and sudden a manner, when a thought struck her.

"It will be better that this deed should appear the work of a robber," she murmured to herself.

Then, without another moment's hesitation, she retraced her steps to the scene of that terrible and mysterious assassination.

No one was near; and now the silvery light of the placid moon played upon the countenance of the murdered woman.

"I am not frightened at death—I have seen too much of it," said the veiled lady to herself, with a contemptuous curl of her lip.

She glanced rapidly around, to assure herself that there was no dread of interruption: and, stooping down, she hastily rifled the corpse. Concealed about Ida's person was a letter; this the veiled lady took, together with the purse and rings of the murdered woman.

The dagger which Ida had wielded lay upon the ground—the moonbeams kissing its bright blade, as an innocent child might caress a sleeping snake.

The veiled lady seized the dagger, and plunged it into the breast of the corpse.

At that moment approaching footsteps fell upon the ears of the veiled lady; and, rapid as thought, she hurried away from the rampart.

In another minute, Faust, wrapped in his mantle, arrived at the spot where the terrible deed had been perpetrated.

Seeing a human form lying upon the ground, he stooped towards it—he gazed upon its face.

"Ida!" he exclaimed: "and in male attire! Ida—murdered—dead! Who could have done this? Ah! her purse—her rings are gone: her garments have been torn open and rifled. This is the work of a robber."

"Short-sighted mortal!" murmured the portentous voice of the Demon in his ears; and at the same moment a shadow was thrown upon the spot, interrupting the pure flood of the moonlight.

Faust turned hastily round, and exclaimed, "What dost thou here? I did not summon thee."

"No," replied the Demon, folding his arms across his breast, and gazing with a sort of diabolical satisfaction upon the corpse of the murdered woman; "but I knew that you would be anxious to learn whose hand has robbed you of your paramour. Short-sighted mortal, I say again: do you suppose that one who has the will and the power to perpetrate a deed like this, is not also endowed with the cunning necessary to give a particular aspect to the crime? Where—after all—is the ingenuity in rifling a corpse, in order to create a belief that a robber's hand inflicted the deadly blow?"

"True!" exclaimed Faust, struck by this observation. "But did you behold the deed? were you nigh—and did you raise no hand to save this woman, who was to some extent dear to me?"

"I was here—on this very spot, when the blow was struck," answered the Demon. "Invisible to both the murdered and the assassin, I saw it all. But Ida's time had come—and no power which I possess could have availed her."

"Who was her assassin? Speak!" exclaimed Faust.

"A woman," was the reply. "Ida had overheard your appointment with the lady on whose finger you beheld a ring of marvellous workmanship; and she came hither to avenge herself upon her rival. Behold that slight scratch upon the cheek of the dead: it was the lady's ring which did it—a ring than which no viper's fang contains a more deadly poison."

"Ah!" cried Faust; "that ring filled me with strange suspicions!"

"Thus it was that your Ida died by the touch of that ring," continued the Demon, in a calm and measured tone, as if he were relating some pleasant tale; "and then the dagger, which was to have wreaked her vengeance upon a supposed rival, was plunged into her own bosom."

"I must know more of that mysterious lady of the veil and ring," said Faust, after a pause. "I beheld her countenance for a few moments—and never saw I aught more lovely in the shape of a human face."

"Not even Theresa's?" asked the Demon, with a chuckle.

"No—not even Theresa's," replied Faust.

"Nor Ida's?" continued the fiend, more sarcastically still.

"No—nor Ida's," answered the Count. "But take me at once to the abode of this mysterious fair one."

"Wilt thou leave the corpse of thy late paramour thus exposed upon the city ramparts?" demanded the Demon.

"For me to proclaim the discovery of this murdered woman, were to risk suspicious injurious to myself," said Faust. "It must remain here—the next passer-by will raise the alarm; and the corpse will then be removed with befitting decency. Come—I am burning with curiosity to know more of the lady of the ring. Where does she reside? who is she? what is her name? Yesterday she spoke mysteriously of her rank and family power: her father, she declared, was seated upon a throne; but, I confess, I attached little importance to so strange a tale."

"She did not deceive you, Faust," answered the Demon. "Yes—her father is a powerful sovereign—and she is wedded to the near relative of a reigning Prince."

"She is married, you say?" exclaimed Faust, somewhat disappointed by this announcement.

"She is wedded to her second husband," returned the Demon. "But what of that? She is the mistress of her own acts—the universe cannot control her imperious will! Were I to speak in the language which you mortals so often use, I should say that beneath the form of an angel lurks the heart of a fiend—aye, of a very fiend!"—and he chuckled ominously. "But enough of this discourse at the present moment. Restrain thy curiosity a little, Faust; and I will show thee strange things. Give me thine hand."

The Count of Aurana did as he was desired; and in another moment himself and the Demon—now both invisible to mortal eyes—stood in a large apartment in a house belonging to a respectable but secluded street outside the walls of Vienna.

The room was well furnished, and contained, at the moment when Faust and the Demon thus strangely entered it, two persons. One was Father Anselm, the Superior of the Capuchin convent in the Julian Alps; the other was a man about thirty years of age, tall and slender, with black hair, dark eyes, a pale complexion, and an auburn beard. He was attired in a violet-coloured doublet, slashed on the shoulders and at the elbows; and on his head he wore a black velvet cap, with a long dark plume which waved over his left shoulder.

These two persons were seated at a table, on which were dishes of fruits, flagons of wine, and crystal drinking-cups. At the moment when Faust and the Demon introduced themselves into the apartment, its occupants—who of course remained perfectly unaware of any intrusion that was effected in a manner alike noiseless and unseen—were continuing their conversation in the following manner:—

"You are therefore determined to leave Vienna this night, father?" said the young man.

"Yes, my lord," answered the priest. "The German capital is no place for me. A rumour, of a nature to fill me with apprehension, has prevailed throughout the day; and two persons have declared positively that they met me. You know to what I allude. Then, again, a chief of the Secret Tribunal should never linger in the capital—the place where the power of the Vehm is most abhorred, and where its authority has least influence."

"And yet you contrived to fill the Emperor himself with alarm—even in the midst of his own palace, and in the privacy of his own chamber," returned the other, laughing heartily.

"Fortunately for the interests of the Holy Vehm, my lord," replied the priest, "one of the imperial pages is devoted to us; and it was his hand that planted the Cord and Dagger on the Emperor's table."

"But it was not his hand that stopped the progress of the courier to the governor of Laybach," said Father Anselm's companion, again laughing.

"No, my lord," answered the priest, solemnly; "that duty was performed by my own hands. The chiefs of the Vehm must at times—on important occasions—fulfil the functions of the subordinates. It was necessary that we should ascertain the precise nature of the commands sent by the Emperor to the governor of Laybach; and by waylaying the courier myself, I incurred no risk of losing those important documents of which he was the

bearer. We have thereby discovered that the governor was instructed to inundate the defiles of the Julian Alps with his troops; and the map furnished by Otto Pianalla would have taught him how to plant his forces in such points that all supplies of provisions would be cut off, and the convent—impregnable as it is to an entire army—would be compelled to yield to famine."

"And are you determined that your adherents shall abandon the convent altogether?"

"No, my lord. But, by the steps which I have taken,—by killing the courier and paralyzing the energies of Maximilian at least for a few days, by means of that warning symbol of the Cord and Dagger,—I have gained time sufficient for Fritz and Walstein to reach the convent, and lay in provisions necessary to enable the place to withstand a siege that may weary out the patience of the governor of Laybach."

"The escape of those two adherents of the Holy Vehm was truly remarkable," observed the priest's companion. "Even they themselves could only give vague and confused accounts of the whole transaction. There is something beyond all belief in the idea that my sister should have been enabled to induce the Count of Aurana to exert himself in that respect."

"I cannot understand how her highness should have any private motive to induce her to deceive us on this head," observed the priest. "Be it, however, sufficient for us that Walstein and Fritz have escaped, and are now far on their way towards Carniola. In a couple of hours I shall be pursuing the same path."

"And to-morrow I shall quit Vienna with my sister," said the priest's companion. "Fortunate was it for Walstein that private affairs of our own happened to bring us, under fictitious names, to this city at a moment when his folly had involved him in such a serious embarrassment. I have, however, often smiled at the impudence of the man in availing himself of his similitude to the Baron, to personate him and obtain possession of his property."

"And I, my lord, have never forgiven him for keeping all that fortune to himself," answered the priest, laconically. "Moreover, that very imposture has led, by a chain of circumstances, to the release of the Baron of Czernin; and whatever were the motives of your lordship and her highness, your sister, for consigning the Baron to close and perpetual imprisonment—"

"Have I not before informed you," interrupted the priest's companion, "that this Baron of Czernin one evening penetrated into our mansion at Venice—when we were residing for a few weeks under a strict *incognito*, while we plotted certain schemes which eventually raised my father to his present eminence;—this Baron, I say, penetrated into our mansion, and there beheld the interior of a particular chamber with whose secrets you are not unacquainted. Walstein was in the house at the time; and he had just been giving an account of his adventures at the Turkish galleys and of his intimacy with that identical Baron, when my sister suddenly remembered that the door of the secret chamber had been left unlocked. She and Walstein proceeded thither—for Walstein was anxious to possess a phial of *Aqua Cantarella*—always a useful drug for those who serve our family. Scarcely had they reached the door when they perceived a person in the room. Walstein instantly retreated; and my sister advanced to demand an explanation of the intruder. She was immediately struck by his likeness to Walstein; and was not, therefore, greatly astonished when he informed her that he was the very Baron of Czernin of whom Gregory had been previously speaking. He gave an explanation for his presence in that room, which might or might not be a correct one. It was certainly true that my mother had been chastising a female dependent—for you know, holy father, that the Spanish blood of my maternal parent frequently boils to a temperature which overpowers her patience; and the Baron alleged that screams of some woman in distress had led him into the house. Now, surrounded with spies as we were at that time—and watched by so many enemies, who were all jealous and suspicious not only of my father, but of all our family—it was natural for us to adopt precautionary measures. Thus was it that my sister and myself instructed Walstein to consign the Baron to your custody in the convent:—but we did not desire him to personate his lordship in Vienna," added the priest's companion, laughing.

"Your lordship never before explained to me so fully the reasons of the Baron's captivity," observed the priest. "But I can now perfectly understand them. At the time when the Baron penetrated into the secret chamber of

your mansion at Vienna, the interests of your family might have been seriously compromised by the revelation of what he had seen there."

"Assuredly, holy father. And never would he have quitted that house alive, after having beheld the mysteries of the secret chamber, had not my sister's heart been softened by his handsome appearance. Afterwards, she would not consent to my proposal, that Walstein, Fritz, and Conrade should subject him to the penalty of the Cord and Dagger; although, for our safety, she agreed to the idea of his eternal captivity. Thus, a woman's caprice spared him; and he is now at large to publish all he knows—as he did yesterday in the tribunal—of the secret chamber."

"The Cord and Dagger can reach him still, my lord," said the priest, with a significant glance.

"No—let him live," was the answer. "He is totally unaware of the names of those who occupied the house, wherein he beheld such objects; and, moreover," added the speaker, proudly, "our family is now too powerful—too highly placed, to care about such revelations. No—let him live, I say."

"As your lordship chooses," was the meek reply. "I have received too many benefits at the hands of your lordship's family to disobey a command from your lordship's lips."

"We will find thee a rich prelacy soon, good Anselm," returned the other; "for thou hast served us long and faithfully."

"Ah! my lord," cried the priest, his countenance becoming animated with a glow of pleasure; "how deeply grateful am I for this kind promise!"

"We will not forget thee, holy father. But what can detain my sister thus? I strictly enjoined her to observe great caution at Vienna; but her unwearied spirit of gallantry—her endless amours—render her as restless as a ghost, and even tend to compromise our gravest interests."

Father Anselm was about to reply, when the door opened, and the veiled lady—the object of Faust's new passion—entered the room.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### IDA'S LETTER.—THE FUNERAL.

THE lady threw aside her veil, and flung herself exhausted upon a seat, exclaiming, "Wine, brother! I am faint and wearied. Caesar, I say—give me wine."

"And poison with it," muttered the cavalier in the violet-coloured doublet, as he filled a crystal goblet, "if thou dost not obey my wishes more than thou hast done of late."

"Nay, sweet brother," returned the lady, receiving the cup with a smile; "wherefore are you ever menacing me in this wise? Know you not—" and her countenance grew suddenly dark and fearfully menacing—"that if you and I commence a warfare, it will be a terrible one?"

Then she drained the goblet of its contents.

"But this is foolish, Caesar," she continued, throwing her exquisitely modelled arm over the back of the chair in such a manner that the mystic ring, which now bore a lion's head, was fully exposed to the eyes of Faust: "of all our family you and I must not—dare not quarrel. We know each other's ambitious designs, and we are mutually too useful to those projects to endanger or ruin all by idle contentions."

"And yet you are incessantly compromising the *incognito* which we deem it necessary to preserve in this city, by those affairs of gallantry which take you so often abroad," exclaimed Caesar. "While the Arch-Chancellor is exerting all his influence to induce Maximilian to consent to our father's proposals in respect to the treaty of friendship, and while so much depends upon the belief which the Emperor entertains that the Arch-Chancellor is advising him through purely disinterested motives, you are seeking adventures which may lead to a recognition of our presence in Vienna. Then, if the Emperor once suspected that I had been on the spot, to prompt the Arch-Chancellor how to act, he would break off all negotiations at once."

"Granted—granted, dear Caesar," exclaimed his sister. "But these words are unnecessary—inasmuch as to-morrow we quit Vienna, the Emperor having promised your friend the Arch-Chancellor to sign the treaty which may enable our father to dare all his enemies. You will, however, permit me to observe that my idle ramblings, as you seem to consider them, have not been altogether



useless. Did I not accidentally pass by the Czernin mansion at the very moment when Walstein was led forth a prisoner? and perhaps the hope which I imparted to him in a hasty whisper had the effect of sealing his lips in respect to secrets which we should not wish revealed, and which he might have offered to betray as the price of his liberty."

"All this I admit, sister," answered Cæsar. "You acted with your usual address and presence of mind."

"Again, sweet brother," continued the lady, with a smile, "you insisted that I should not be present at the trial yesterday. Know you not by this time that danger is a mere unsubstantial phantom in my eyes? I disobeyed you—I visited the judgment hall—and the result was my encounter with the Lord of Aurana, whom I induced to exercise his influence in effecting the escape of Walstein and Fritz."

"In that instance you were also fortunate," said Cæsar. "But where your wanderings have led to good results in a few instances, they have involved you in peril in a thousand others."

"Peril!" repeated the lady, with a contemptuous toss of her beautiful head and a curl of her haughty lips; then, assuming a gracious and winning expression of countenance once more, she added, "This evening, too, I have been abroad, contrary to your desire, Cæsar; and what you may term my obstinacy and imprudence may lead to results useful to our best interests at the imperial court."

"Prove this much, sister," exclaimed Cæsar, "and I will never more gainsay thee in thy whims and wishes—be they what they may."

"Listen, then, attentively," continued the lady. "In the first place, I have killed Ida—the wife of Gregory Walstein."

"Is that your grand result?" demanded Cæsar, contemptuously.

"Be not impatient. Ida was the paramour of the Count of Aurana."

"And the Count will leave no means untried to discover the person who has deprived him of his mistress," said Cæsar.

"But the Count is in our power," answered the lady, triumphantly. "Nay—interrupt me not again: you shall know all. On Ida's person I discovered a letter addressed by her to the Count, and which I have already found an opportunity to glance over. This letter contains an astounding secret—a secret of so strange a nature—"

At this juncture, Faust turned hastily towards the Demon and beckoned him imperiously away.

The Demon shook his head, in a manner which conveyed an intimation that they should stay where they were.

But Faust, who trembled lest Ida might have alluded in her letter to the incidents of the Chamber of the Cradle and the change of the children, whispered in a hurried but stern tone, "Come with me—I command you, by virtue of our bond!"

The Demon dared not disobey the adjuration, but took Faust by the hand; and in another moment they were standing in a secluded part of the ramparts—at some distance from the spot where Faust had discovered Ida's body.

"Methinks your lordship was strangely hurried to quit such good society?" said the Demon in a scornful tone.

"Silence, fiend!" ejaculated Faust. "As yet I am your master—and 'tis yours to obey!"

"'Tis mine to obey!" returned the Demon. "Have you any farther commands for me at present?"

"One only. Tell me the name of that woman by whose hand Ida fell."

"It is a name that is known throughout Europe," answered the Demon,—"a name at which thousands of stout hearts tremble."

"And that name?" cried Faust impatiently. "Speak!"

The Demon laid his hand upon the Count's shoulder, and bending his tall form towards him, breathed a name in his ear.

"Ah!" ejaculated Faust, with a shudder—yes, even he shuddered at the mention of that name: "and this woman," he added, musing, "declares that I am in her power!"

\* \* \* \* \*

In the meantime a patrol, on going his rounds along the fortifications, had discovered a dead body lying in the path. It was immediately conveyed to the nearest military station; and, to the surprise of the soldiers, the

deceased, though dressed in male attire, proved to be a woman.

One of the archers of the guard, then present, had been of the number who had arrested Gregory Walstein, Fritz, and Schurmann; upon which occasion he had seen Ida. He now contemplated the countenance of the murdered woman with attention; and at length he expressed his conviction that the corpse was that of the lady who had espoused the impostor.

This rumour was speedily circulated through Vienna, even at that late hour; and it reached the ears of Pianalla, who immediately repaired to the guard-house.

The report was too well founded! There—stretched upon a rude bench, and covered over with a rough military cloak—lay the remains of the once beautiful, but ambitious and criminal Ida.

Otto threw himself upon his sister's corpse, and wept bitterly.

The soldiers withdrew; and he was left alone with all that was left of her whom he had never ceased to love, in spite of her guilt.

"Ida—my sister—my dearest sister!" he exclaimed, pressing his lips to her cold brow, which vibrated not to the touch; "and hast thou died thus early—perhaps unrepentant? Was the assassin's dagger to be thy fate—and haply thy punishment? Oh! if thy crimes were great and manifold, the mercy of God is also illimitable! And may He, who has created everything for his own wise purposes,—whose goodness is apparent throughout all his works,—and whose hand guides those who place their confidence in him,—may He receive thy spirit, departed girl, into his everlasting rest! Oh! I have felt—full often felt the keenness of the arrows of adversity: I have drunk deeply of the cup of affliction. I have known poverty the most bitter—want the most pinching;—and yet, O God! my trust was ever in Thee! And sincerely can I say, that whenever, in the anguish of my heart, I have raised my voice in prayer unto thy throne, hope has entered into my soul—and a voice has seemed to whisper in my ears, '*Thy supplication is heard!*' How beautiful, then, is prayer—how lovely is that worship which the believer offers up to the Deity!"

Otto fell upon his knees by the side of his sister's corpse, and continued to implore, in the most fervent manner, the mercy of heaven in behalf of his departed sister.

He rose—soothed, tranquillized by this act of the most heartfelt devotion.

The door opened; and the Baron of Czernin entered—followed by his servants, carrying a bier covered with a pall.

"My dear young friend," said Theodore, pressing Otto's hand, "the remains of your sister must be conveyed to my dwelling; and thence we will all follow them to the tomb."

This delicate attention on the part of the Baron was deeply felt by the young artist.

And all was done as Theodore had promised. The corpse was borne to the house which he temporarily occupied in Vienna, and at which, as we have before said, Otto and his Italian friends were staying.

The Countess of Aurana and the Archduchess Maria repaired on the following day to weep over the remains of her who had once been their companion, and of whose crimes they were happily ignorant.

On the third morning after her untimely death, Ida was consigned to the tomb, over which many tears were shed and fervent prayers were breathed by those who attended the mournful obsequies.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### ROME.

THE scene now changes to the Eternal City; and Time has given birth to the year 1497.

Rome is busy and bright with all the gaiety of the Carnival.

Within its circuit of thirteen miles—in all its vast gardens and vineyards,—throughout its narrow streets lined with magnificent structures,—along the Strada Felice, and around its beautiful church of Saint Maria Maggiore,—in the Strada di Porta Pia, at one end of which stands a splendid gate, and at the other a group of noble statues,—all round the papal palace on the Quirinal Hill,—in the vicinity of the Pantheon, that beautiful monument of Roman taste which survived the depredations of Goth, Vandal, and Pope,—up to the very walls of the Coliseum, that amphitheatre of Vespasian,

which is the most stupendous relic of antiquity in the Eternal City,—in a word, everywhere might be seen crowds of masques, in all the fantastic and sometimes tasteful variety of an Italian Carnival.

Rome was at that epoch a grand and a mighty city; and its neighbourhood was as delightful and as attractive as it is now barren and unhealthy.

But at the time of which we are writing, the fearful contest between the families of Orsino and Colonna had not desolated the vast Campagna, nor changed its rich fertility into a miasmatic waste.

Around the Eternal City were beautiful villages, where dwelt a gallant people—tillers of a fair land. The threshing-floor was covered with the heavy grain; the stately ox, like a pampered epicure, was dainty amidst the richest herbage of the earth.

Throughout the Roman States were spacious towns, bustling cities, and crowded quays, with all the graceful decorations of social life: there, too, the civilization of the age prevailed in all its glitter, its gaiety, its beauty, and its strength.

Looking beyond those centres of light, the eye beheld a rural population, happy, industrious, and possessing hearts overflowing with warm and generous emotions. There, too, were the fat pastures, the tillaged field, and the wide landscape teeming with its blessed fruits;—there also were the most precious ornaments of the scene,—the neat cottage, the thriving village, the manufacturing town.

Such were the Roman States—such, too, was Italy, at that period!

Alas! where now are the glorious stir of industry, the ferment of toil, the proud desire of competence, which swells the veins and muscles of a sound society? Oh! where they should be are only wretched huts, and squalid habits, and wasted forms; recklessness and crime; rage, and misery, and want.

But it is with the Rome of 1497 that we have now to do; and, as we have before said, gay was the Eternal City at that period!

The arena, called the Square of Saint Peter, was crowded with masques, all performing a thousand antics, to amuse a group of noble personages who were stationed in a balcony of the Vatican. The Cathedral of Saint Peter, which now stands upon a portion of that vast space, was not then in existence. Even the Vatican itself—that gorgeous palace which has been enriched by the genius of so many great architects—was at that period only remarkable as an immense and ancient building.

Foremost among the spectators in the balcony of the Vatican was Pope Alexander VI. This Pontiff, of infamous memory, was originally named Roderigo Lenzioli Borgia; and by birth he was a Spaniard. When in the prime of life, he was implored by a dying friend to protect the wife and two daughters who were about to lose their natural defender. Roderigo promised; and his friend died in peace. Shortly afterwards the widow was laid by the side of her husband; but with her last breath she besought Roderigo to be a father to her unprotected daughters. He again promised faithfully; but scarcely was the funeral over, when he consigned one of the orphans to a convent, and made the other his mistress. This latter was named Rosa Vanozza, and was reputed to be the most beautiful woman of the age. Five children were the issue of this connection.

At the time when we introduce the Pope to our readers, he was about sixty-seven years of age—a hale, healthy man, in spite of a long life of debauchery, intrigue, and crime. Near him in the balcony sat Rosa Vanozza, whose countenance bore the remains of that transcendent beauty which had once been so famous throughout Europe. On the other side of the Pope was his son, the Duke of Valentinois, who scarcely a year previously to this period had assassinated his eldest brother, the Duke of Gandia.

But while the Papal family and several cardinals were enjoying in the balcony the spectacles of mummery beneath, an incident, which we must record, took place in another part of the city.

It was in a narrow street, called the Strada della Lingara, that Faust was standing apart from the crowd, beneath a deep archway, into which he had retreated to avoid the pressure of the multitude.

It was about an hour after mid-day; and the heat was intense. But, in spite of the oppressive nature of the atmosphere, the Carnival sports relaxed not; nor did the crowd diminish.

Faust had been some minutes beneath the arch when a

female, in fancy costume, and wearing a black silk mask, suddenly emerged from the multitude and approached him. Her form was of the most exquisite symmetry, the graceful contours and voluptuous proportions of which were set off by the light attire of a shepherdess which she wore; and from behind the mask a pair of brilliant eyes shot forth burning, fervent glances.

Laying her delicate hand gently upon Faust's arm, she said in her musical Italian tones, "What brings the Count of Aurana to Rome?"

Faust started: that voice was well known to him—had never ceased to vibrate in his ear since he first heard it in Vienna.

"Your own matchless beauty, lady, may afford a solution to that query," he replied, seizing her hand and pressing it with rapture.

"Your lordship is pleased to be complimentary," she exclaimed, laughing, and withdrawing her hand, slowly.

"I declare that I was never more serious in my life," returned Faust. "Since I saw you in Vienna, vainly have I endeavoured to conquer the passion with which you have inspired me. Your image has haunted me night and day. At length I could endure these tortures of the heart no longer: I accordingly set out on a journey hither—with the hope of meeting you again."

"And when did you arrive in this city?" asked the lady, after a short pause.

"This morning," was the answer; "and Fortune has already favoured me, since she has enabled me so soon to attain the object of my hope."

"Then you were not aware that this house is my own residence?" continued the lady. "No! In that case, I must act the part of a hostess to convince you that the Fortune whom you admire has actually conducted you to my very door."

With these words she pulled the wire of a bell: a side-door was opened by a female servant; and the lady led the way into a magnificently furnished apartment on the ground floor, the windows of which looked not upon the narrow street, but on a beautiful garden.

The lady threw aside her mask, and ordered the servant to bring refreshments. This command was immediately obeyed; cakes, preserves, and wines of the most exquisite description were introduced on a silver tray; and the lady made a signal for the domestic to withdraw.

"You remember, lady, how we parted in Vienna," said Faust, when he was once more alone with his beautiful hostess. "A certain agreement existed between us: it was my part to effect the release of two persons in whom you felt somewhat interested;—and my reward was to be a glance of thanks from those bright eyes and a smile on those sweet lips. But, lady, we met not according to appointment."

"You were too late, my lord," answered the lady; "for I declare most solemnly that I was true to the place and the hour named."

"And when I reached the appointed spot," said Faust, attentively watching his fair companion's countenance, "I found not a beautiful woman, warm with animation—but a cold and bleeding corpse."

"The body of your paramour Ida," observed the lady, without changing colour or betraying the least agitation. "I also beheld the same lamentable spectacle."

"And doubtless your quick eye noticed the mark upon her face—trifling though it were?" said Faust.

"Yes—I noticed even that," was the unembarrassed reply.

"Was the corpse rifled—plundered, at the time you beheld it, lady?" asked the Count.

"Even as you describe it," returned the unblushing fair one. "But way do we thus dissemble our real feelings? why do we thus affect a mutual ignorance? Away with such child's sport, my lord! Doubtless you are well aware that Ida fell by my hand? But I sought not her death—I knew her not; I had no injury to avenge—no enemy to remove in her! I slew her in self-defence, my lord,—as I have slain others—and as I would slay you, were you to cross my path."

With these words, she drew from her bosom the ring bearing the ominous lion-head, and leisurely placed it upon her finger.

"That is your weapon," observed Faust, coolly.

"Yes, my lord: the one which mystified you somewhat in Vienna," was the reply, accompanied by a laugh. "This lion's-head is harmless: see, I will press it against my cheek. But, now,"—and, touching a secret spring, the leonine effigy suddenly changed into the head of a viper,—“now,” she continued, “the slightest touch were

death—instantaneous death—as with that Ida whom you regret.”

“I regret her not when I behold you,” said Faust. “But wherefore did you rifle the corpse of her whom you slew in self-defence?”

“Little as I reckon danger, my lord, I never fail to adopt wise precautions to avert suspicion from myself, in those cases where such suspicion would be injurious. In the one to which we are alluding, those precautions were followed by results useful to our family; inasmuch as the mere fact of rifling the corpse of Ida, to create an impression that the poniard of some lurking thief had drunk her heart’s blood,—that simple fact placed in my hands a certain paper which so intimately concerns a great noble of the German court, that in the hour of need myself or my family might call upon him to exercise his influence with the Emperor and the Archduke in our behalf;—and he would not dare to refuse our demand of his services.”

“That paper must contain some strange secrets,” observed Faust, casting a penetrating glance upon his fair companion: then, without waiting for a reply, he added, “Did you not ere now proclaim a truce to all child’s-play? I will not affect to be ignorant of your allusions: no—that paper refers to myself—and it is I who am in your power. Be it so, lady! But I would rather serve you for the sake of those bright eyes, than in consequence of menace and danger.”

“Think not that your secrets are known to those who will make an unworthy use of them. No, my lord: we ourselves—my family, I mean—have plunged so deeply into intrigue, machination, plot, and scheme, that we have long learnt to look upon the craft as a noble one, and to esteem those daring mortals who venture into similar paths. And not to keep you in suspense, my lord, concerning the precise nature of those secrets which have come to our knowledge in reference to yourself,—for you, like ourselves, may have many, many secrets,—I will at once show you the letter which I found upon the person of Ida.”

The lady rose, and left the room for a few minutes. On her return, she presented a paper to Faust. It was addressed (according to the custom of the age) to “*The Most High and Noble Lord, the Count of Aurana;*” and its contents were these:—

“Misfortunes seem to have combined against me; and the boundless attachment which I have entertained and still entertain for you, appears to be the fruitful source of many miseries. In obedience to your wishes, I espoused a man who has proved to be a vile and detestable impostor; and now—instead of the Baroness of Czernin—I scarcely know whether I am Ida Pianalla or Ida Walstein—the wife of one who is branded with infamy. This man is now at large in the world again. But how has he escaped? Something tells me that your power befriended him—that power, the secret of which fills me with awe as I ponder upon it!

“Yes—the infamous Gregory Walstein is at large; and—if he entertain enmity against me, or should wish, by some sudden caprice, to claim me as the partner of his fortunes—he can at any moment ruin or subdue me;—for—as you well know—he is no stranger to that fearful crime which weighs upon my soul—the murder of my child—of your child!

“Nor is this the sum of my afflictions. But, as if I were not already degraded and wretched enough, you must level another—and, oh! a most cruel blow—at my heart! You no longer love me! Last evening I heard you make an appointment with a rival. But she dies—whoever she may be. Yes—this evening shall be her last—even if I slay her in your presence!

“You have conducted yourself unworthily towards me—towards me who have loved you so madly, consoled you so sincerely in your dark hours, aided you so effectually in the grandest and most perilous of your schemes. Yes—for, without me, never could you have succeeded in substituting your own son for the daughter of the Archduke in the Chamber of the Cradle!

“Reflect, then, upon all my claims on you—on all your obligations towards me. I write this, that you may ponder well upon my condition—that you may have my sentiments before you in a shape better calculated to make an impression than mere words from my lips. I shall leave this letter in the evening with your faithful valet; he will give it to none save you. It will reveal to you by whose hand your new mistress has fallen—for she shall not live to be my successful rival;—and this deed

will convince you that I am as inveterate in hate, as impassioned in love.

“I require what would be much at the hands of a common mortal—but which is nothing to demand of one who possesses a power like yours. I seek to be released from all danger at the hands of Gregory Walstein:—his death will effect that! I also seek a brilliant position—rank, title, wealth, and honour. Grant me all I ask, and never shall you find me otherwise than your fond and grateful

“IDA.”

“Thus, you perceive, my lord,” observed the lady, when Faust had perused this strange composition, “that your secret of the Chamber of the Cradle is known to me.”

“And to whom besides?” demanded the Count.

“To my brother Caesar, and to a priest named Anselm,” was the answer. “But that secret is safe with us. Your lordship may retain the letter—and destroy it.”

“Your friendship will enlist me more sincerely in your service than your menaces could ever do,” said Faust, who was rejoiced to think that the dread source of his power had not been betrayed by Ida’s letter. “And now we begin to understand each other, lady; for, be well assured, that I know and comprehend you as well as you know and comprehend me. First united to a nobleman of Spain, you led a joyous and voluptuous life, free to roam whither you willed—now dwelling at Pisa—now pursuing your pleasures and your intrigues at Venice—then visiting Rome again. But when your father attained his sovereign rank, that union which you had formed was deemed derogatory: it was dissolved—and you espoused Giovanni, Lord of Pezaro. A second time did your marriage become obnoxious to the policy of your family; and, fortunately, madam, you possess a sire who has the power to bind and loose. Another divorce was proclaimed; and you lately accompanied Alphonzo of Arragon to the altar.”

“Your lordship is recapitulating facts well known to all Europe,” said the lady, smiling. “Surely you speak not thus to convince me how well you are acquainted with my private affairs?”

“Ah! lady,” exclaimed Faust, “were I to enter into a detail of all the incidents which I have gleaned in connexion with yourself and your family,—your amours—your gallantries,—the poisoned banquets which you know so well how to serve up,—the profound secrecy with which your enemies disappear from your path,—the nature of your cantarella and its antidote—

“Enough, enough—my lord!” exclaimed the lady: “we do indeed understand each other! But are you not afraid—do you not tremble to court the love of a woman whom you know so well?”

“No; for I also have my antidotes—and, perhaps,” he added, with a proud smile, “you would find in me one whose life is proof against the rapid venom of that ring!”

“You are a being after my own heart!” ejaculated the lady, extending her hand towards him. “Dauntless—proud—rich—handsome—and acquainted with crime, as you are—I love you, Count of Aurana!”

“A thousand thanks for that avowal, beautiful one!” cried Faust, pressing the lady’s charming hand to his lips; “for I also love—yes, adore you, LUCREZA BORGIA!”

## CHAPTER L.

### LUCREZA BORGIA.

YES;—the lady, who wore the poisoned ring, the lion-head of which became so suddenly transformed into that of a viper at the will of the wearer—was no other than the famous Lucreza Borgia, daughter of Pope Alexander VI., by Rosa Vanozza, and sister of Caesar Borgia, Duke of Valentinois.

History has never recorded the deeds of three greater fiends in human shape than Alexander VI., Caesar and Lucreza Borgia. This terrible trinity hesitated at no crime that could advance their worldly interests, or tend to the aggrandisement of their fortunes. Their intrigues had secured the election of Alexander to the Papal throne; and never did the Eternal City present so awful a scene of demoralization and blackest turpitude as when the Keys of Saint Peter were held by that execrable Pontiff.

Lucreza was the personification of all the external beauty that ever decorated woman, and of all the detestable vices that ever disgraced the female sex. Her ima-

gination was impurity itself;—her licentiousness knew no bounds;—her ambition was unlimited;—her readiness to accumulate crime upon crime was such that she almost seemed to find a pleasure in perpetrating deeds of the darkest dye.

The example of such a family as the Borgias was not calculated to benefit the Roman nation. Female purity was ridiculed in the reign of Alexander VI.: the Cardinals, the Archbishops, and the Bishops plunged recklessly into the vortex of dissipation, and publicly acknowledged their illegitimate children. Assassinations in the streets of Rome were of such frequent occurrence that they scarcely elicited a comment. The police were inefficient, and open to bribery; money purchased impunity at the hands of the judges; and bravos amassed fortunes by selling the service of their daggers to the wealthy and influential.

Such was the state of Rome at the period when Faust renewed with Lucreza Borgia that acquaintance which had been slightly commenced at Vienna.

It was the evening of that day the incidents of which were recorded in the preceding chapter.

Lucreza Borgia was sitting alone in her bed-chamber, in the private house into which she had admitted Faust in the morning. She had a magnificent palace in another part of Rome; but, as her princely rank compelled her to maintain a grand establishment of ladies-of-honour, lacqueys, valets, and other dependants, she was too much overlooked in her ducal dwelling to enable her to prosecute her political and amorous intrigues with that caution which even the most depraved to some extent observe. She accordingly retained a limited and faithful set of menials at her private abode; and it was also here that she and her brother Caesar met to concert those various schemes which were necessary to effect the removal of enemies or to further their ambitious projects.

We dare not do more than allude to the fearful intimacy which existed between Lucreza and Caesar. Suffice it to say that in no one point was the sum of their iniquity incomplete.

It was evening; and Lucreza Borgia was seated alone in her bed-chamber, the lion-headed ring upon her finger.

To fathom the thoughts of such a woman, by the usual index of the countenance, were impossible; for beneath a comparatively guileless aspect, lurked the heart of a fiend.

She was, however, evidently waiting for some one; for from time to time she cast a look towards a water-clepsydra which stood on the mantel. Then she rose and advanced towards a secret door, artfully pierced in the wainscot, and which, when opened, revealed a narrow staircase. This staircase communicated with a private entrance into the garden. Having satisfied herself that the door was unfastened, she returned to her seat.

It was now nine o'clock, and Rome was quiet.

Suddenly a low knock was heard at the door of the chamber—not the private one just referred to.

Lucreza hastened to withdraw the bolt, thinking that one of her attendants required admission; but to her surprise and alarm, two men, with naked daggers in their hands, and wearing black masks upon their faces, rushed into the chamber.

"What signifies this intrusion?" demanded Lucreza, instantly recovering her presence of mind.

One of the masks hastily bolted the door behind him, and then, advancing towards Lucreza, said in a low and solemn tone, "Prepare for death, madam; your hour is come!"

"Godfredo Morcome!" exclaimed Lucreza.

"Yes, madam," cried the foremost intruder, throwing aside his mask, and revealing the stern but handsome countenance of a man of about forty. "I am here to avenge the death of my uncle the Cardinal of Cosenza!"

"And I, your Highness," said the other, stepping forward, and also flinging off his mask, "am Frederico Baschi, the cousin of Cerviglione, whose death I am likewise here to avenge."

"Signors," exclaimed Lucreza, "your vengeance would fall upon the innocent in striking me. Godfredo Morcome, I had naught to do with the death of your uncle. Frederico Baschi, you wrong me by declaring that I was an accomplice in the murder of your cousin."

"We know that you are guilty of those crimes," returned Morcome. "But even were you innocent of any connivance in them, your crimes are still so great that you must die! Rome demands the blood of the Borgias; and three cardinals—yes, madam, three cardinals—have engaged to grant absolution for ridding the world of two

such monsters as yourself and your brother Caesar. Prepare, then, for death!"—and he brandished his dagger in a threatening manner.

"Mercy!" screamed Lucreza. "Grant me but a few minutes to prepare myself—for I am not fit to die! You say that three cardinals are your instigators in seeking the deaths of two children of the Pope—who are they that we have offended? Perhaps reparation might be made—perhaps—"

"Cardinals Cassa Nova, Copis, and Castellense have no terms to make with you or yours," interrupted Morcome, fiercely. "Now are you acquainted with the names of those who will grant absolution to the two men by whose daggers Rome is to be relieved of Lucreza Borgia and Caesar Duke of Valentinois. Yes," he continued, his eyes flashing fire, "I will grant you a few minutes ere this bright steel drinks thy heart's blood! But it will not be to give thee leisure for prayer:—of what avail were prayers for crimes like thine? No—on thy knees shalt thou listen to a recapitulation of those terrific deeds which demand our vengeance. Kneel, Lucreza Borgia—kneel, I say!"

And with a rude grasp Morcome compelled the affrighted woman to assume a suppliant posture before him.

"Oh! now I begin to taste the sweets of vengeance!" he exclaimed: "now is the haughty Lady of Pezaro and Duchess of Spoleto humbled in my presence! Frederico Baschi, behold this detestable woman kneeling at our feet: mark her horror-struck countenance—gloat over her despair! Did she show mercy to thy cousin Cerviglione? No! Did she show mercy to my uncle the Cardinal of Cosenza? No! Nor can we show mercy towards her!"

"It were criminal to spare her," answered Baschi, fixing an infuriate glance upon the prostrate woman. "Moreover, you have mentioned the names of the three cardinals—and these circumstances alone must outweigh any other that might appear in her favour."

"True," observed Morcome. "Lucreza," he continued, in a tone indicative of deeply concentrated emotions, "listen to the reasons which have induced my companion and myself to swear a terrible oath together to rid Rome of you and your brother Caesar."

"Nay—you have not sworn to murder me!" cried Lucreza, with terrified looks, first at one, then at the other. "No—no! you could not slay a defenceless woman!"

"We will crush a serpent, whose venom is rapidly circulating throughout the arteries of society," answered Morcome, suddenly. "Oh! you may glance around you—but vainly! for no succour will come! Else, vile woman, think you that we would stand parleying with you thus? You are in our power—and we must torture you with reproaches, ere we put you out of your misery with our weapons!"

"My God! why does he not come?" murmured Lucreza, to herself, as she buried her face in her hands—for now this bold woman trembled, finding herself as it were face to face with death.

Then Frederico Baschi approached, and addressed her in the following manner:—

"Three years ago, madam, Rosa Vanozza, your mother, gave a grand feast at her suburban villa of Saint Pietro ad Vincula. I need not name the guests: they consisted of all the members of your family, the principal cardinals and prelates, and the chief nobility of Rome. My cousin Cerviglione sat next to his friend the Duke of Gandia—your late brother. You, madam, left the table early; you retired to this house—the den where you hatch your infernal conspiracies and settle the details of your crimes: and hence you despatched a masked messenger to your brother the Duke of Gandia, with a note requiring his immediate presence here!"

"Spare me!" cried Lucreza, casting a horrified glance on Frederico Baschi.

"Spare you!" he repeated, contemptuously: "whom did you ever spare? Listen, madam! The Duke left the table in obedience to your summons, and requested my cousin Cerviglione to accompany him as far as the corner of this street—for Rome was as dangerous then by night as it is now. Another guest rose from the table a few moments afterwards, mounted his horse, and rode rapidly back to the city by a bye path. At the corner of the Ghetto he joined four men—four bravos—who were waiting for him. The Duke of Gandia soon afterwards passed the spot—alone—for Cerviglione had already taken leave of him. Then the desperate work of death commenced; and the Duke of Gandia was foully murdered—the horseman calmly looking on! When the dread deed

was accomplished, the corpse was thrown into the Tiber; and the horseman came hither to acquaint you that all was over! That horseman was your brother—Cæsar Borgia;—and thus were you privy to, and he the superintendent of, the assassination of your eldest brother, the Duke of Gandia!”

“It is false!” cried Lucreza. “I did not write the note: it was not I who sent it!”

“Die not with an untruth upon your tongue, madam,” returned Federico, solemnly. “A short time afterwards Cardinal Giovanni—your cousin—and who was devotedly attached to the Duke of Gandia, set out from Ferrara to Rome to investigate the murder of that prince and avenge it. Cæsar and yourself met him at Forlì, and invited him to a banquet. Oh! the dread feasts of the Borgias! You showered all possible courtesies and attentions on your cousin—while you poisoned his wine-cup! Thus did you remove from your path a generous-hearted man who had sworn to avenge his murdered friend. But that was not all: your fears did not allow you to stop there. My cousin Cerviglione—a high-born gentleman, a brave warrior, and captain of the Papal body-guard—was one night attacked by a bravo, and assassinated. Lucreza Borgia, I am here to avenge that death!”

“No—you cannot find it in your heart to kill me!” she exclaimed. “Depart—and I will load you with rank, wealth, and honours.”

“The veriest simpleton in Rome would not put faith in the promise of a Borgia,” was the stern reply.

“And now, madam,” said Godfredo Morcome, again coming forward, “listen to the details of that death which I am here to avenge! My uncle, the Cardinal of Cosenza, was arrested on an accusation as false as it was vile—an accusation of forging the Pope’s name to an apostolic brief. That brief the Pope himself had signed—and you know it! It was to grant a dispensation to a nun to contract marriage; and sixty thousand ducats were the price your father claimed and received for that favour. The act was noised abroad; and, to save your father’s honour—the honour of a Borgia!—a victim was sought. That victim was my uncle. He was thrown into a dungeon in the Castle of Saint Angelo. There Cæsar Borgia and yourself—yes, you, Lucreza—sought him in his cell, and obtained from him—partly by entreaty, and partly by menaces—a written avowal that he had signed the dispensation. Once provided with that precious document, the Borgias knew of but one course to pursue;—and that was to rid themselves of the depository of so important a secret. Then, by the cruel orders of Cæsar and yourself, Lucreza, the Cardinal of Cosenza was consigned to the deepest of the deep and the gloomiest of the gloomy dungeons of Saint Angelo, where he was allowed two pounds of bread and a small can of water every three days. You can well divine what must have been the agony of that long starvation! For one year did he languish in his dungeon; and then—as the vigour of his constitution seemed to withstand the tortures of want and despair—you commanded his food to be stopped. A week afterwards he was found dead in his cell—having literally gnawed the flesh off one of his arms; Lucreza Borgia, it is this fearful crime—this infernal deed on your part, that I am here to avenge!”

“And now listen to me, Godfredo Morcome—listen to me, Federico Baschi,” exclaimed Lucreza, rising from her knees: and, drawing her fine—her really noble form up to its full height, she confronted her foes with a pale countenance, but with a lip that quivered not as she spoke, nor with an eye that quailed beneath their stern glances: “the bitterness of death is already past—and I am prepared to meet my doom. I have two requests to make—two favours to implore at your hands, ere my bosom receives your daggers.”

“Speak, lady,” said Morcome; “and be brief: our interview has already been too long.”

“Take this key,” answered Lucreza, drawing one from beneath her garments, “and open yon cabinet, which contains a miniature of my murdered brother, the Duke of Gandia. I would look upon it ere I die; methinks that if I press it to my lips, the spirit of the original will be appeased—will pardon me.”

“Your request is reasonable, and shall be granted,” said Morcome: then, receiving the key from Lucreza’s hand, he advanced towards the cabinet.

“And you, Federico Baschi,” continued Lucreza, while Morcome was endeavouring to turn the key in the lock, which somewhat resisted his efforts, as if it were rusty, “tell me at least that you will forgive me—when I shall be no more—for the death of your cousin Cerviglione.”

“Yes, lady—I will forgive you—I will even pray for you!” answered Baschi. “But you must die!”

“Oh! I am prepared to die now that you will forgive me!” ejaculated Lucreza Borgia; and, seizing Federico Baschi’s hand, she pressed it as if with grateful fervour.

Then she started back, and a fearful scene ensued.

At the same moment a loud cry emanated from the lips of Federico Baschi; and this was echoed by another which came from Godfredo Morcome.

The latter staggered a few paces from the door of the cabinet, and fell heavily upon the floor; and almost at the same instant Federico Baschi rolled over the body of his friend.

Both were dead!

The handle of the key had been pressed by Morcome in such a manner that a small point on the surface of the iron had pricked his finger—and the wound was mortal!

The mysterious ring had planted its viper’s fangs in the hand of Federico Baschi.

“So perish my enemies!” exclaimed Lucreza Borgia, approaching the dead bodies, and spurning them with her foot. “And now, my Lord Cardinals Cassa Nova, Copis, and Adriano Castellense, I have learnt your secret; and you must be the next victims of the Borgias!”

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the private door above alluded to was opened cautiously, and Faust entered the room.

The light of the perfumed lamp, which hung from the ceiling, fell upon the proud form of Lucreza Borgia, who was calmly—aye, even complacently—surveying the two lifeless forms at her feet.

“Lucreza—your Highness—” cried Faust, in astonishment, as this spectacle met his eyes.

“Be not alarmed, my lord,” exclaimed Lucreza. “Had you been true to the very moment of our appointment, your sword might have saved me from some half-hour’s useless parley with those traitors—of whom, I must candidly admit, I was at first afraid.”

## CHAPTER LI.

### THE POISON OF THE BORGIAS.

ON the following morning Lucreza repaired to the palace of her brother Cæsar, Duke of Valentinois, and related to him the particulars of the intrusion of Federico Baschi and Godfredo Morcome in her chamber on the preceding evening; the secret they had suffered to transpire relative to the three cardinals; and the vengeance which she had so successfully wreaked upon those who had sought her apartments with such deadly intentions.

“Without a moment’s hesitation, Cæsar exclaimed, “Sister, those three cardinals must die. His Holiness, our revered father, must be made acquainted with these particulars; and he will invite them to a banquet which will be their last.”

“We must use caution in this important proceeding,” Cæsar, answered Lucreza. “Those two men, whom I killed last evening, spoke to me of certain circumstances, the details of which were frightfully correct. People begin to observe to each other that many sudden deaths have lately taken place at Rome.”

“This dagger is poisoned, Lucreza!” said Cæsar, with dread significance, as he drew the shining weapon from his girdle.

“Are you mad?” ejaculated his sister. “Would you use it against the cardinals? No, Cæsar—such a proposal is unworthy of one possessing your sagacity. Our enemies must die by poison, and not by a venom so sudden and virulent as that which lurks in the key, the ring, or your dagger. No—the three cardinals must die a lingering death: so that there may be no suspicion as to the real cause.”

“Tis well, Lucreza; you possess a greater store of patience and of prudence than even I,” returned the Duke with a smile. “Leave me; I will compose a poison that shall produce the effect you desire. The lessons of Signora Fontana have not been lost on me. Great was the pity that the poor creature should have died so miserably in Vienna! She was a true proficient in her art.”

“And yet, meseems,” observed Lucreza, “that our liquid *cantarella* is far preferable to all the laboured combinations, decoctions, distillations, and mixtures which Signora Fontana devised.”

“Yes—yes, sister: I grant that we have improved upon the hints which we received from her. Nevertheless, we were indebted to her for all our early chemical knowledge;



and, if the notoriety of the act were not dangerous, I would yet erect a monument to her memory. And now one word more, Lucreza:—is the Count of Aurana pliant and ductile? Will he undertake that the Emperor Maximilian shall remain neutral in all the grand commotions that are likely to take place?"

"The Emperor will remain neutral, Cæsar," was the reply. "The Count of Aurana is my slave. His influence at the Court of Vienna is, as you are well aware, unlimited; and his promise may be relied upon. But farther than inducing the Emperor to observe a strict neutrality in all that may take place on this side of the Alps, Faust will not assist you. He declares that he loves pleasure—and not war."

"No matter!" exclaimed Cæsar. "If the Emperor remain neutral, I will yet be King of Italy! And now leave me, Lucreza: I must procure a slow but certain poison—a poison that will not produce death for at least ten days;—and to-morrow the banquet to the cardinals shall be given."

Lucreza Borgia then left her brother, and returned to her private dwelling, where Faust was awaiting the return of the object of his new passion.

The moment the Duke of Valentinois was alone, he rang a small silver bell which stood upon the table, and his faithful attendant Michelotto entered the apartment.

This man was the chief of Cæsar's sbirri—the right arm with which the infamous Borgia executed his dark projects—the bravo who had struck the Duke of Gandia to the heart—the miscreant who was the depository of all the dread secrets of his more dreadful master.

"Michelotto," said Cæsar, "there is more work for us yet to do. Three enemies of my family must perish. Go thou and fetch thy two principal underlings, and join me in the laboratory."

The chief of the sbirri bowed and left the room.

In a few minutes Cæsar repaired to a large apartment situated in a remote part of the spacious palace. Michelotto and two ill-looking men—the most desperate of the sbirri—were already there.

The room was almost denuded of furniture. To the ceiling several hooks with pulleys and ropes were fastened. On a table in the middle of the apartment were numerous empty phials; upwards of two dozen flasks, filled with the choicest wines of Italy; a stone jar; a silver salver; and a pestle and mortar.

On one side of the room was a massive door, secured with strong bolts, and with a small grating towards the top. An odour as of some wild beast emanated from this grating, and impregnated the atmosphere of the apartment; and from time to time a savage growl came from the other side of the huge door.

"Those phials are all empty, Michelotto," observed the Duke, significantly. "We must replenish them."

"Good, my lord," was the answer; then, turning towards the two sbirri, Michelotto said, "Now Miletto—and you, Tomasso, to work! Ye know your duty."

Cæsar drew his poisoned dagger, and stood at a short distance from the massive door above mentioned.

"Your lordship need be under no apprehension of danger," said Michelotto: "Miletto and Tomasso will muzzle the monster in a moment."

One of the two underlings took from the shelf a leathern muzzle, such as menagerie-keepers, or those who go about with dancing bears on the continent, are accustomed to use. He then placed himself close by the door, the bolts of which his companion proceeded to draw.

The door was thrown open; and an enormous black bear was discovered upon a heap of straw, inside a spacious cell.

For a few minutes the formidable animal remained in a crouching posture in its lair: then it rose—uttered a growl—walked gently round the cell—and, after stopping for an instant at the door, shaking its huge sides, and moving its head up and down, leisurely advanced into the apartment.

Then Miletto dexterously slipped the muzzle over its mouth; and Michelotto at the same instant fastened a cord to the hind legs of the animal. The other end of the rope was tied to a staple in the wall; and thus the bear was completely powerless. It however manifested no disposition to resistance; but, with that indolent unconcern which is peculiar to the species, began to walk backwards and forwards to the extent allowed by the rope.

Cæsar, satisfied that the animal was well secured, returned his poisoned dagger to its sheath, and opening the stone jar on the table, took thence a quantity of semi-metal of a bluish-white colour.

The Duke threw the arsenic—for such it was—into the mortar, and speedily pounded it with the pestle. He then mixed it with water in a small vase; and, when these preparations were complete, the three men held the bear in such a manner that Cæsar was enabled to pour the poisonous fluid down the animal's throat by means of a funnel.

No sooner was this extraordinary process effected, when the three sbirri hoisted the bear up by its hind feet, by means of one of the pulleys attached to the ceiling, while the Duke of Valentinois placed the large silver plate on the floor immediately beneath its head. Michelotto dexterously removed the muzzle; and the huge animal began to plunge and howl in strong convulsions.

In a few minutes a copious stream of foaming liquid was discharged from the beast's throat; and the deadly poison was received in the silver dish.

Then a sickly and almost overpowering odour, as of garlic, pervaded the apartment.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, during which the bear continued to discharge the foamy fluid; and at length it died in strong convulsions.

The liquid was carefully poured from the silver plate into the vase in which the arsenic and water had been mixed; and from thence the various phials were filled.

Reader, this is no romance. The scene which has just been presented to you, is a true and faithful description of the mode in which the Borgias obtained their liquid poison, or *aqua cantarella*. And now a key is also afforded to the solution of a part of those mysteries which the Baron of Czernin beheld, in the *secret chamber* of the Borgias' dwelling at Venice, more than eight years previously to the date which we have reached in our narrative. The other strange appearances in that chamber,—the dead bull, with its stomach ripped open, the gory marks of human feet upon the floor, and the blood-stained bed,—will also be soon explained;—and then—as even now—the reader may exclaim with the poet, "Truth is strange—stranger than fiction!"

Cæsar dismissed Miletto and Tomasso each with a reward; and when they had left the room, the Duke and Michelotto proceeded to complete their preparations. They drew the corks of three of the wine-flasks, and poured into each a small quantity of the poison from one of the phials. The flasks were then stopped with new corks, which were immediately waxed and sealed with Cæsar's own signet.

"Michelotto," said Cæsar, "take those three bottles and give them to the Pope's head butler. Tell him that to-morrow evening there will be a festival at the Vatican, and that he must keep these flasks apart from the other supplies of wine, and serve them only on my orders, and to none save to those guests whom I may mention to him. Be discreet—and deliver your message precisely as you receive it from me."

"Yes, my lord," replied Michelotto.

The chief of the sbirri then left the room; and the Duke of Valentinois shortly afterwards repaired to the Vatican, where he obtained a private interview with his father, Pope Alexander VI.

An hour later, invitations for a grand banquet to be given at the Vatican on the following day were issued to all the cardinals and the nobility then in Rome; and the reader may well imagine that Cassa Nova, Melchiorre Copis, and Adriano Castellense were not forgotten.

## CHAPTER LII.

### THE BANQUET AT THE VATICAN.

On the appointed evening, the Papal Palace was a blaze of light and a scene of splendour.

The principal hall was fitted up in a manner rather becoming the royal dwelling of an Oriental potentate than the abode of the head of the Catholic world.

The table at the upper end was raised on a dais; and in the place of supreme honour was a throne beneath a magnificent canopy of purple velvet and of gold. Two other tables, ranged lengthways down the hall, were prepared for the nobility and their ladies.

Crystal chandeliers and lustres filled the spacious banquetting hall with a flood of light; and perfumed lamps stood upon the tables.

The walls were decorated with festoons and garlands of flowers: gorgeous drapery, emblazoned with the Papal arms and the Keys of Saint Peter, were reflected in vast mirrors deeply set in gilded frames; and sideboards groaned beneath the weight of gold and silver salvers, cups, and goblets.

At seven o'clock the doors were thrown open, and the

guests, preceded by Alexander VI., entered the hall. The Pope gave his hand to his mistress, Rosa Vanozza, who was dressed in a sumptuous manner, and on whose brow was a tiara of diamonds, bestowing upon her that queenly aspect which she indeed studied to assume.

Next advanced the Duke of Valentinois, conducting the lovely Duchess of Sancia, his cousin. Cæsar was attired in a style becoming his rank: and his commanding form certainly assorted better with the dress of a lay-noble than with the robe of a cardinal, which he had once worn.

The third couple consisted of the Count of Aurana and Lucreza Borgia. This lady,—who beneath her fair complexion and light hair concealed the dark soul of a Spaniard,—was attired in a manner which even excelled the gorgeousness of her mother's apparel. Her person was literally brilliant with diamonds, which produced a marvellously dazzling effect in the midst of the flood of lustre which filled the hall. Over her well-shaped head waved three ostrich feathers of snowy whiteness—the gift of the unfortunate brother of the Sultan Bayezid II., the Prince Djem, whom Alexander VI. had already numbered among his victims. Proud and stately,—yet enchantingly graceful withal,—was the bearing of the Duchess Lucreza; and as she smiled at some compliment which her handsome companion breathed in her ear, a stranger would not have believed that so much guile lurked upon those lips between whose parting roses shone teeth white as orient pearls.

The Lord-Duke of Pesaro, Lucreza's husband, came next, escorting the lovely daughter of a Roman noble, but who was the mistress of a bishop.

Then followed a train of cardinals, each accompanied by some eminent or charming woman:—and the procession was concluded by a glittering bevy of proud nobles and beauteous ladies. The waving plumes and sparkling diamonds gave an air of splendour to the scene,—amidst the blaze of light, and in that perfumed atmosphere,—which no pen can describe.

The Pope took his seat upon the throne,—that throne from which, as it were, he overlooked with his mental eyes and overawed by his policy the whole of Christendom. For that was no vain boast which Lucreza Borgia had expressed to Faust in the streets of Vienna, when she so mysteriously alluded to her father's sovereign rank: Alexander VI. was not only terrible to Rome, but to Italy,—not only to Italy, but to the Christian world. Placed upon the proud seat of the Cæsars, the Keeper of the Keys of Saint Peter had studied full well how to render his name feared, if not respected, in every State where men knelt to the Cross; and from the banks of the Tagus to the streams of the Volga all Europe felt the influence of his policy and his dominant will.

At the upper table were collected the cardinals, the great dignitaries, and the most eminent ladies who were present on this memorable occasion. The nobles and fair ones of lesser grade occupied seats at the two tables which were arranged lengthways in that lordly hall.

A hundred guests and two hundred domestics to serve them were now the occupants of the chief banqueting-room in the Vatican.

The Papal Palace had seen a more numerous, but never a more imposing assemblage:—and how many who were there collected have since had their names perpetuated, with a tarnished notoriety, in the pages of history! With infamy has that of Borgia come down to us: with infamy shall it descend to the latest posterity; and long—long will the world continue to marvel that such atrocious deeds could have been actually perpetrated by a Pontiff wearing a mitre-crown, or by a Lucreza of Spoleto and a Cæsar of Valentinois!

Amongst the cardinals at the upper table, but seated some distance from each other, were Cassa Nova, Copis, and Castellense—the three whom the Borgias had marked for their victims,—the three for whom as many poisoned bottles stood apart from the other flasks on a side-board,—the three, in a word, for whom this sumptuous banquet was given!

And never had the really elegant manners of the old Pope been more engaging;—never had Lucreza shone to greater advantage, with all her varied powers of fascination;—never had Cæsar seemed more gay, more cheerful, more condescending.

The tables teemed with all the luxuries which the season could supply, or which human ingenuity could render tempting to the appetite. The most delicious wines of Italy, Germany, Spain, France, and the Islands of the Levant, sparkled upon the board. Then as Beauty sipped the inspiring nectar, fire shone in large black eyes

and a rich carnation tinge appeared beneath the soft darkness of the Italian complexion.

And there,—even there, in the sacred halls of the Vatican,—the significant glances of cavaliers were answered by the languishing and voluptuous looks of lovely women: confessions of passion were met by tender avowals of reciprocity;—appointments were made and future meetings arranged;—there also were engendered many heart-burnings and many jealousies;—and even beneath the holy robes of the Church burnt the fiercest passions, and agitated the darkest cravings for revenge!

Three hours had elapsed: it was now ten o'clock.

The conversation at the upper table had turned upon holy relics, talismans, and philters.

"For my part," said Alexander VI., "I confess it appears to me consistent with the goodness and wisdom of Heaven that certain favoured mortals,—mortals especially favoured, I mean, by the hand of Providence for its own wise and inscrutable purposes,—should possess talismans as safe-guards against danger; and, therefore, I do firmly believe in the existence of such talismans, as well as in the efficacy of holy relics and peculiar influence of charms and philters."

"The opinion of your Holiness is an authority which none will venture to dispute," observed Cardinal Caraffa, the Pope's principal secretary of Briefs, Bulls, and Indulgences; "and, if I mistake not, your Holiness possesses a talisman which is a safeguard against all perils?"

"Nay—I cannot flatter myself that it is a charm against all danger," responded the Pope; "but, most assuredly, it is a safeguard against poison and the dagger."

"Were it not indiscreet to proffer so bold a request," said the beautiful Duchess of Sancia, "I should implore his Holiness to gratify me with a glimpse of so inestimable a talisman."

"My charming niece shall not ask in vain," returned Alexander, smiling; and, as he spoke, he thrust his hand into the bosom of his doublet, beneath his pontifical robes;—but the talisman was not there.

His countenance became for a moment overclouded:—that expression of gloom and suspicion was, however, only transitory; for, suddenly recollecting himself, the Pope turned towards Cardinal Caraffa, exclaiming, "My lord, I left the talisman of which we have been speaking upon the table in my private apartment where I signed the various Briefs and Indulgences which you brought me this morning. It is a medallion with a gold chain, and contains a consecrated wafer."

The Cardinal understood the hint, and rose from the table to fetch the talisman, which had been left in an apartment where various important papers were lying, and whither the Pope, therefore, did not choose to despatch one of the menials in attendance.

It happened that Cardinal Caraffa was on intimate terms with Cardinal Copis, one of the intended victims on this occasion; and as those two high dignitaries had been sitting next to each other all the evening, Cæsar Borgia had entertained some alarm lest Caraffa should partake of any particular flask of wine which might be placed before his friend Copis.

Now, therefore, was the time to consummate his atrocious intentions; for the private apartment of the Pope was so far removed from the banqueting-hall, and had to be reached by so many passages and windings in the palace, that at least ten minutes must elapse ere Caraffa would return.

"With the permission of his Holiness," exclaimed Cæsar, "I would humbly propose that we quaff a goblet in honour of our noble guest, the Count of Aurana, whose rank and influence at the court of Maximilian are well known to us all."

"Thou hast my free permission," answered the Pope, who fully divined Cæsar's intentions; "and let it be a cup of our best wine that we quaff in honour of our noble and right welcome guest."

Cæsar beckoned the head butler towards him, and whispered a few words in his ear. These were the instructions to whom to serve the wine in the three flasks that stood apart from the rest on the sideboard. Almost at the same moment the Duchess of Sancia desired that a dish of forced peaches, which was standing on the side-board, might be placed upon the table.

Now the head butler was bound, according to the etiquette which controlled the attributes and functions of his place, to serve the peaches to the Duchess ere he complied with the commands of the Duke of Valentinois. But, in order that no time might be lost, he directed the under-butler to pour out the wine in the manner which Cæsar had directed.

The under-butler filled several glasses which he placed upon a silver salver, and then handed them to the Pope, to Caesar, to the Count of Aurrana, and to the three Cardinals, Copis, Castellense, and Cassa Novis. In the meantime, the domestics waited upon the other guests at the same table.

The crystal goblets were all bright with ruby wine; and when the Pope bowed to the Count of Aurrana, those cups were drained in honour of the German noble.

Scarcely was the ceremony completed, when Cardinal Caraffa returned to the room—his countenance deadly pale, his eyes rolling wildly in their sockets, his lips quivering, and his manner so changed and agitated as to attract general notice.

He fell upon his seat, breathing with difficulty, and casting terrified glances around him.

"My lord—what means this?—are you indisposed? Perhaps some sudden malady?"

"No, your Holiness," replied Caraffa, speaking with difficulty; "I am not physically indisposed;—but morally—Oh! I have received a dreadful shock!"

And again the cardinal glanced wildly around.

"Speak, my lord!" cried the Pope. "Has anyone dared to molest you in our dwelling?"

"Your Holiness will pardon me if I implore that no further questions may be addressed to me on the subject," said Caraffa, exerting all his mental energies to subdue his agitation and at least seem collected; "it was a vision, your Holiness—and I will think of it no more!"

"A vision!" repeated the Pope, laughing. "My lord, the serious nature of our conversation had filled you with vague fears, and peopled your imagination with strange phantoms. But your lordship must acquaint us with the particulars of this vision."

"I beseech your Holiness—I implore you, Most Reverend Father, to excuse me," exclaimed the cardinal, earnestly.

"Nay—I command thee to reveal to us the nature of a vision which has so cruelly unsettled thee," said the Pope, in a tone that convinced Caraffa of the inutility of remonstrance.

Nevertheless, the cardinal still hesitated; but the Pope gave him an imperious and significant glance, which warned him that further delay would only provoke his sovereign displeasure.

"Your Holiness," said Caraffa, "that vision regarded yourself!"

"Myself!" ejaculated the Pope. "Nevertheless, we will have thee relate it. Proceed, my lord."

"Your Holiness shall be obeyed," said the cardinal, meekly. "On leaving this hall to repair to the private chamber of your Holiness, I took a lamp from a niche in the corridor leading to the interior of the palace, and continued my way through the various passages which I was compelled to pursue. On reaching the private chamber of your Holiness, I opened the door; but a sudden current of air extinguished the lamp which I held in my hand. Lights, however, appeared to be burning in the apartment—"

"Lights in my private chamber!" ejaculated the Pope, his high and open forehead suddenly contracting with indignation. "Who could have dared to violate the sanctity of that room?"

"Your Holiness will soon be satisfied that no human being was guilty of that audacity," returned Caraffa, in a solemn and impressive tone.

A dead silence now reigned throughout the hall: there was something awfully mysterious in the cardinal's reply to the Pope's indignant exclamation.

"Yes," continued Caraffa, after a short pause; "I beheld lights in that room. I threw the door wide open; but scarcely had my foot touched the threshold, when I started back, overwhelmed with terror."

"Proceed, my lord," said the Pope, seeing that the narrator hesitated once more: "proceed, my lord; and keep us no longer in this suspense which has thrown a spell upon our festivities."

"A terrible spectacle met my eyes," proceeded Caraffa. "In the middle of the chamber there was a bier, with a corpse stretched upon it; and around it were six wax-tapers, burning gloomily. But that corpse—oh! I recognised the features but too well, in spite of the livid and distorted appearance of the countenance!"

"And that countenance, Caraffa—those features?" said the Pope, speaking with constrained composure: "whose were they?"

"Your own, Most Reverend Father!" was the solemn answer.

A cry of horror burst from the assembled guests:—the cheek of beauty suddenly lost its carnation tinge; the flushed countenances of nobles and cavaliers became ashy pale.

"By heaven!" ejaculated Caesar Borgia, starting up, and drawing his sword half-way from its sheath, "the wretches who have dared to make the private chamber of his Holiness a scene of mummary like this, shall dearly rue their unhallowed sport!"

"Calm yourself, my lord Duke," said Cardinal Caraffa; "it was no mummary—no preparation by mortal hands. When I had somewhat recovered my presence of mind, I crossed myself, and the vision vanished, leaving me in total darkness."

"And my medallion?" demanded the Pope, in a tone proving that this strange narrative, the revelation of which he had himself provoked, had not failed to make a profound and disagreeable impression upon him.

"I felt for it in the dark, and found it on the table where your Holiness had left it," answered Caraffa, taking from his bosom a beautiful medallion set with precious stones and attached to a chain of massive gold.

"Give it to me!" exclaimed the Pope, extending his hand anxiously to receive the talisman, on whose efficacy he placed the most implicit reliance;—for deeply steeped in sin as he was, his mind was imbued with all the gross superstitions of the age; "give it to me, Caraffa," he cried: "so long as that precious medallion is in my possession, I need not fear my enemies—for it would alike warn me of the presence of the hostile blade as of the poisoned cup!"

And the Pope reached forward to receive the medallion, which Cardinal Caraffa handed to him.

But scarcely had Alexander VI. touched the talisman, when he uttered a cry, and fell back on his throne in violent convulsions.

Almost at the same moment Caesar Borgia experienced peculiar sensations in the stomach: and a terrible suspicion of the truth flashed to his mind.

"My lord," whispered a voice in his ear, "I fear that the three poisoned goblets were delivered into the wrong hands. His Holiness is dying—yourself are ghastly pale—and I feel that I have drunk an unwholesome beverage. The three cardinals have escaped!"

Caesar Borgia turned round, and beheld Faust leaning over him.

"I am at a loss to understand your lordship," said Caesar, sternly.

"Nay—your sister Lucrezia has no secrets from me," returned Faust. "But I should counsel you to take an antidote as speedily as possible."

"And you, Count—what will you do," demanded the Duke, in a hoarse and scarcely audible voice.

"I!—oh! you need not alarm yourself on my account," replied Faust, with a triumphant curl of his lip.

Then, turning away, he joined the crowd of guests who had gathered round the Pope.

Thus was this grand scene of festivity and rejoicing turned into one of mourning;—thus did the designs of the two principal plotters against the lives of three cardinals redound upon themselves.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE SLAUGHTERED BULL.—THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER VI.

RECKLESS of his dying father,—intent only on his own safety,—Caesar Borgia rushed precipitately from the banqueting-hall, and returned to his own palace.

There he issued hasty orders to his faithful Michelotto, and then hurried to his bed-room, which was on the ground-floor.

Having swallowed an antidote, he undressed himself, and sought his couch, where he lay pondering in no envious humour upon the events of the evening.

Half an hour elapsed, when a private door in the wainscot opened, and Michelotto made his appearance.

"Is everything ready?" demanded Caesar.

"Everything, my lord," was the reply.

The Duke of Valentinois rose, enveloped himself in a warm silk dressing-gown, and hastily passed by means of the private door into an adjoining room.

This inner chamber contained a bed in one corner:—a large fire blazed in the grate; thick curtains were drawn over the windows; and a lamp was suspended from the ceiling. Near the bed four upright posts were fixed, like pillars, between the floor and the ceiling; and to the upper parts of these posts were fastened pulleys with

strong cords. Several large wooden tubs, or buckets, stood upon the floor, which was uncarpeted; and on a rude table were two or three knives with long sharp blades, and an immense wooden mallet.

The moment Cæsar had entered this room, Michelotto opened a large door on the side opposite to the private entrance: and four of his sbirri led an enormous bull into the apartment, from a species of shed or stable adjoining.

The bull was stunned and felled with a heavy blow from the wooden mallet, dealt by the powerful hand of Michelotto: the sbirri then threw the bull over on its back, and hastily fastened its legs to the four posts above mentioned.

One of the men next took a large knife from the table, and made an incision about two feet long in the stomach of the beast, which uttered low moans. The intestines were taken out and caught in the wooden buckets; and Cæsar, stripping himself naked, entered the stomach of the bull, and thus partook of a bath of blood.

Having remained in this position for about ten minutes, —while the slaughtered animal was yet warm and palpitating,—Cæsar left his horrible bath, and got into the bed close by, where a profuse perspiration broke out all over him.

This was the mode in which the Borgias assisted the operations of the antidotes to those poisons which they themselves had frequently tested in order to ascertain their precise influence—a dangerous experiment which they had not feared at times to make, so confident were they in the efficacy of the counteracting drugs, when aided by baths of blood.\*

While still in his blood-stained couch, and with the possibility, if not the probability, of death before his eyes, the Duke of Valentinois was not unmindful of his temporal interests:—of his spiritual welfare he was completely careless.

As soon as the sbirri had removed the bull and the wooden vessels, and cleansed the floor of the blood-stained imprints of their master's naked feet, they were dismissed.

Cæsar then called Michelotto to his bedside, and said, "It is almost impossible that my father must survive this accursed accident. His great age must succumb beneath the influence of the poison, in spite of all the antidotes in the world; and, moreover, he is not in a situation to take a bath of blood. Such a proceeding would lead to the most ruinous suspicions. Hasten then to the Vatican, with two of the most faithful of thy retainers; and, if the Pope's situation be as desperate as I imagine, seek the High Treasurer, Cardinal Cassa Nova, and—by fair means or foul—obtain from him the keys of the private cabinet of his Holiness. Thence thou wilt bring hither all the money, plate, and jewels there deposited."

It was now past midnight; and Michelotto, attended by his two most trustworthy sbirri, departed to execute the Duke's orders.

The bravo-chief and his two myrmidons, enveloped in cloaks, and with their slouched hats drawn over their countenances, threaded their way through the streets leading to the Vatican.

All Rome was in commotion. The news that the Pope had been taken desperately ill, accompanied by vague rumours of foul play, had spread like wild-fire; and people were running hither and thither—they scarcely knew why—in all directions.

The rival factions of Colonna and Orsino had already

mustered their numerous retainers; and the Eternal City was a prey to all the evils of agitation—anarchy—robbery—disturbance—and assassination.

Meantime Michelotto and his two sbirri reached the Vatican. The Pope was stretched on the bed of death—but conscious of all that was passing around him. Lucreza had deserted her father, and retired to her own private residence, where she awaited the issue of the events which now menaced her family with downfall and ruin.

Of all the guests who a few hours previously had been gathered in the banqueting-hall in the Vatican, none save three or four cardinals remained to solace the dying Pontiff. And of those cardinals, two—Cassa Nova and Copis—were of the number, and for whom the poisoned wine had been prepared: but of this fact they were then ignorant.

Michelotto summoned Cassa Nova from the Pope's chamber, and led him into a retired apartment where he had already posted his two sbirri. There, by means of the most dreadful threats, and by actually holding a dagger to the cardinal's breast, Michelotto compelled him to deliver up the keys of the Pope's private treasury.

Cassa Nova was locked in the room, with the assurance that if he attempted to raise an alarm or to escape within an hour, death should be his portion.

Michelotto and his two sbirri then proceeded to the treasury-chamber, where they found two chests filled with gold, plate, and jewels of immense value. These were conveyed to Cæsar's palace.

Early on the following morning, the Duke of Valentinois sent Michelotto with all his sbirri and guard to occupy the Vatican. Thus the dying Pope was alarmed, in his last hours, with the clatter of arms and the dread preparations for civil strife. But Cæsar was determined to maintain his power by force of arms, and to allow no Pontiff, save one of his own selection, to ascend the throne of St. Peter.

Alexander VI. languished for eight days—sensible all the while, yet never once expressing a desire to see his children, nor even breathing their names. He received the last sacraments of the Church, and at length expired in fearful agony.

And now Cæsar Borgia himself repaired to the Vatican, where he took up his abode, the Papal palace being in a complete state of siege.

Cæsar's countenance bore strong traces of the violent poison which he had imbibed, and of the effects which had been produced on his frame by the struggle between the venom and its antidote. His face was ashy white; his lips were livid and swollen; and his eyes fearfully bloodshot. He was, moreover, so weak, that he was scarcely able to crawl about.

When the death of Alexander was publicly made known, the President of the Apostolic Chamber, with Cæsar's consent, assumed the executive functions of the State, according to custom. The ceremony of removing the papal ring from the finger of the deceased, in the presence of the cardinals, was dispensed with; because the body had become so black, swollen, and putrid, and its countenance so hideous, that the Duke of Valentinois did not dare give confirmation to the rumours abroad by allowing the corpse to be seen by anyone save his own faithful adherents.

The preparations for the funeral were hurried for a variety of reasons—but chiefly because the body had become so offensive that an impure odour pervaded the whole of the Vatican, and also because the position of the Borgias was so critical, in consequence of the enmity of the Orsino and Colonna factions, that only the election of a Pope favourably inclined towards them, could save them from utter ruin—and perhaps from a terrible death.

## CHAPTER LIV.

### THE CHAMBER OF DEATH.

THE night before the funeral, Cæsar, wrapped in his dressing-gown, proceeded from his own apartment in the Vatican to that where the corpse of Alexander lay.

The body was in its coffin, which stood upon a bier, at the four corners of which burnt long wax tapers. No mourners were present to watch by the side of the dead; for the superstition of the times rendered Alexander terrible even in his death, and the atmosphere of the chamber, in spite of silver lamps burning with frankincense, was pestilential and nauseous to a degree.

It is impossible to account for the impulse which

\* The reader who is not well acquainted with the history of the Borgias, may probably imagine all that is here related of them to be mere fiction. It is therefore necessary to state that the account we have given of the mode in which they obtained their deadly fluid from the poisoned vomit of bears,—the anecdote of the ring with the lion's head that might be changed at will into that of a viper,—the bath of bull's blood,—the poisoned lock of the door,—the envenomed dagger,—the Pope's medalion talisman,—and even the very names of the Borgias' poisons, are all matters of historical fact. Neither have we exaggerated the atrocity of the characters of the Borgias. All the crimes with which Morcome and Baschi reproached Lucreza Borgia in the fiftieth chapter, as well as the circumstance of Alexander and Cæsar being poisoned by the wine intended for the three cardinals, are also strictly true. We have, however, anticipated by about six years the correct date of Alexander's death—an anachronism for which we plead the license of romance.

prompted Cæsar Borgia to visit the chamber of death at that midnight hour. Whether it was a transient gleam of affection, inspiring a wish to cast a farewell glance upon the remains of his sire;—or whether it were the effect of some sudden and overwhelming remorse, it is vain to conjecture. There are, on certain occasions, particular impulses for which the objects of them cannot themselves account; and yet Cæsar Borgia was scarcely the man to be urged by any of those tender sympathies which constitute the pure metal in the dross of our species.

Be the cause which took him thither at that midnight hour what it might, *there* he nevertheless was!

Raising the pall from the coffin, Cæsar looked long upon the changed, swollen, and discoloured features,—lately so handsome, even in old age—now so revoltingly loathsome.

"And this is all that remains of him who a few days ago was terrible throughout Christendom," said Cæsar, aloud, as he still gazed on the disgusting spectacle. "Thy death will influence not only Italy, but the whole civilized world! And how soon will those who did not dare to judge thee harshly while living,—how soon will they be busy with all thine actions, since thou art no more! Already art thou powerless: that countenance, whose frown once overawed a nation,—that hand which could sign mandates so deeply affecting the interests of Europe, will soon be food for worms! And—in a few years—some wretched sexton or other grovelling menial of the tomb will weigh in his hand the last ashes which remain of all that was once Alexander the Sixth!"

"Peace be to those ashes!" said a low and subdued voice close by.

Cæsar started!—and for a moment he was afraid.

Then a form, enveloped in a mantle, rose from a kneeling posture on the other side of the bier; and, beneath the dark shade of a hood, Cæsar recognised the countenance of his sister Lucreza.

"What!" he exclaimed, in astonishment; "have you been praying?"

"I have been praying—and for the first time for many a long day," answered Lucreza. "But do you suppose—can you believe that our prayers will avail for him?"

"If reptiles could speak, Lucreza," said her brother, bitterly, "dost thou imagine that man would spare the viper because the adder implored mercy in its behalf?"

"Oh! Cæsar, blaspheme not! The compassion of God must not be judged by comparisons in which human frailty plays a part!"

"Make thyself a nun, Lucreza," said the Duke, contemptuously. "Art thou about to pule and whine when so much energy is required at our hands?"

"I know that our fortunes are desperate," answered Lucreza. "But—in the presence of a spectacle like this—in the solemn hour of midnight—in the chamber of death—I may be pardoned if I yielded to the force of emotions which I had not experienced until now. I resolved to see my father's remains ere they were consigned to the tomb: I stole from my private abode, and came hither for that purpose, little dreaming that I should meet you by the side of our father's bier. But when I entered this room and saw it deserted—not a mourner—not a hireling even to affect lamentation;—when I found myself alone with the dead—alone with the remains of him who was lately so terrible to all save us,—I felt overwhelmed by sentiments which I cannot define; and suddenly all the crimes—yes, Cæsar, *all the crimes* of my life seemed to array themselves in terrible shapes to my mind's eyes. Then I trembled—I looked fearfully around: the room appeared to be peopled with the spectres of *those whom we have slain*—horrible forms hemmed me in around—ghastly countenances gazed on me from their winding sheets—livid lips muttered anathemas against me—skeleton fingers pointed menacingly at me—and the pall spread over the coffin seemed to be agitated ominously. Oh! I was afraid, Cæsar:—I endeavoured to escape from the room, and could not! My feet were riveted to the spot—my legs were as heavy and as motionless as if they were of marble. Then I sank down on my knees—and prayed; and methought that I was consoled! My mind grew tranquillized—the spectres disappeared; and a voice seemed to whisper in my ears, '*There is hope even for Lucreza Borgia!*'"

"Cease this absurdity, sister!" ejaculated the Duke, impatiently. "You will make a child of even me. Away with such ideas:—I dare not yield to their influence! No—we have leisure for nothing like remorse: our path is beset by enemies—our position is most critical. Come, Lucreza—it is not good for either you or me to remain

*here*. Our hearts must be steeled against all compunction: we have been tigers so long, that were we now to become lambs our foes would tear us to pieces. Come, Lucreza, I say—come away from the chamber of death! To-morrow—after the funeral—I will visit thee at thine own private abode, and discourse upon our prospects. Farewell till then: I will summon Michelotto to conduct thee in safety home."

Lucreza suffered herself to be persuaded by her brother; and she followed him from the apartment where lay the remains of their father.

But was there not a scintillation of light remaining in the gloomy caverns of that woman's mind? was there not a single grain of purity at the bottom of the mass of filth and abominations which filled that woman's soul? Yes—for the light of heaven's own star is reflected, be it never so faintly, even in the depths of the foul and weed-choked pool!

And oh! had not her brother appeared in the chamber of death at that moment, the light would have expanded in her mind—that grain of purity would have purified other portions of her soul;—and then, indeed, would there have been hope for even Lucreza Borgia!"

But Providence had ordained otherwise.

## CHAPTER LV.

### THE PAGE OF THE ROMAN PEOPLE.

On the ensuing morning the funeral of Pope Alexander VI. took place.

According to the custom of those times, the body was placed in a coffin which had no lid, but which was simply covered with a sheet of the finest linen and a pall of black velvet.

A profusion of spices, powerful odours, and aromatic herbs had been deposited, for an obvious reason, within the folds of the winding-sheet.

At seven o'clock in the morning the funeral procession emerged from the Vatican, and took its way towards the chapel of Saint Peter—(we have before said that the cathedral was not then in existence)—where the Roman Pontiffs were interred.

The streets were lined with the troops of the Duke of Valentinois, under the command of Michelotto; and behind those serried ranks of grim and ferocious-looking sbirri, were gathered the myriads of the Eternal City, all anxious to witness a ceremony which was invested with a certain solemnity, in spite of the abhorrence that was attached to the memory of its object.

The windows and balconies were crowded with faces,—cavaliers and ladies,—old men and young,—rich and poor,—the illustrious and the beautiful,—the glorious and the charming.

As a matter of necessity rather than respect, the principal houses were hung with black; the bells of the numerous towers of Rome tolled solemn knells; and all the shops were closed.

The procession was opened by a number of the inferior clergy, all carrying lighted tapers—for the day was mild, without a breath of air, though dark and gloomy. Next came the members of the Sacred College, preceded by the Vice-Chancellor, and attended by youthful pages carrying lamps burning with frankincense. Then followed a small detachment of Cæsar's troops; and after these came the coffin, supported on the shoulders of six men, the pall being borne by eight cardinals. Behind the remains of the Pope were the superior orders of the clergy; and these were followed by the great dignitaries and lay nobles of the State. Another detachment of soldiers, headed by Cæsar in person, closed the procession.

Thus soon had the gay carnival been changed into a scene of solemnity and awe! From the People's Gate to the Coliseum—from the Baths of Diocletian to the Castle of Saint Angelo, there was scarcely room to wedge another human being. The multitudes filled the square of Saint Peter, the court of Saint Damascus, and all the adjacent streets, so that not a particle of ground nor pavement was visible; and as the dense crowds rose amphitheatrically up all the neighbouring thoroughfares which commanded a view of the object of universal interest, the very houses themselves seemed walled with human faces to at least mid-height. And all these myriads of eyes sent forth glances which radiated to one common centre—the funeral of him who had lately overawed a world!

The procession moved on: already had it left the Vatican a hundred yards behind, when suddenly the murky atmosphere was illumined with a flash of lightning—long, bright, forked, and vivid.



The hum of tens of thousands of voices was hushed as instantaneously as if the countless spectators had been converted into marble, and had thus realized the tales of Oriental writers.

At any other time that precursor of a storm would have excited no more than an ordinary interest; but on this solemn occasion—when the remains of a sovereign Pontiff, who had been terrible alike by his crimes and his policy, were passing to the tomb—the public mind was prepared to receive any natural incident of the kind as a superstitious omen or a manifestation of the divine feeling.

The lightning was followed by a peal of thunder which seemed to shake Rome to the very centre, and paralyzed every limb. For a few moments the procession stopped; and the coffin-bearers staggered beneath the weight of their burden. Even the grim and ferocious sbirri trembled, they knew not why;—even Cæsar Borgia cast a hurried and anxious glance around;—even the bravo Michelotto was overawed by some unknown and ineffable spell;—and the priests crossed themselves with tremulous hands.

Before the multitude, the soldiers, the coffin-bearers, and the clergy had recovered from the sudden and awe-inspiring panic, a second flash of lightning played over the lowering welkin; the thunder crashed as if myriads of carriages were rolling on a paved road in the invisible regions above, and the spire of the church of Santa-Raparata fell with a horrible din.

This was an omen of dread portent; for, at the death of Innocent the Eighth, Alexander's predecessor, it was alleged that heaven had presaged the coming evils in the same manner;—lightning had struck the sacred fane of Santa-Raparata, and Roderic Borgia was elected Pope!

Now—as this same Roderic Borgia was on his way to the tomb—heaven seemed to announce fresh calamities to Rome,—lightning struck Santa-Raparata a second time; and the people were once more overwhelmed with awe, terror, and vague apprehensions.

And now the storm began to rage with pitiless fury; and the atmosphere was filled with that sulphurous odour and lurid light which accompany the convulsions of the elements.

An indescribable alarm—an alarm of a profoundly solemn and fearfully superstitious nature—now took possession of the multitudes which thronged the streets; and that living ocean began to be agitated—wildly agitated, like the real sea.

Men exchanged glances which expressed no defined motive of terror, and which were yet ominously significant as to the existence and extent of that terror:—then they clenched their fists, loosened their daggers in their sheaths, and seemed suddenly imbued with feelings of intense ferocity, hatred, and revenge.

Cæsar perceived this menacing operation of popular resentment;—he felt as if he were standing upon a mine that was about to burst;—he knew that some awful peril was at hand.

"Keep your ranks firm, as you value your lives," he exclaimed to the soldiers who lined the streets.

Nor was Michelotto blind to the popular storm which appeared ready to burst and keep the elemental tempest fearful company. By a rapid signal which he made, the rear ranks of his sbirri faced to the right-about; and thus one line, on either side of the streets, was turned towards the procession, while the other confronted the people.

But of what avail are a few soldiers, however well disciplined, when opposed to a populace influenced by so terrible an idea of vengeance as that which now inspired the Roman people? Were there not all the atrocities of the accursed family of Borgia to punish? were there not all the mysterious murders, the dark deeds, the instances of diabolical oppression, and the shame brought by a detestable family upon a powerful State, to avenge? The hour of such vengeance now seemed to be at hand;—the remains of the Pope might be insulted in his passage to the tomb, and there was one of the hated race of Borgia then present on whom the multitude could wreak their resentment. Moreover, heaven itself appeared to mark that day with terrible omens for the future; and these presages of calamity filled the Romans with an apprehension that made them desperate.

And now the multitude began to agitate, as it were, with the turmoil of tempestuous waves; low murmurs raised a buzzing din; then those countless voices seemed to gain courage, and spoke out more loudly and more boldly,—increasing in volume and energy until a hundred thousand cries proclaimed "Death to all the Borgias!"

Michelotto ordered his sbirri to stand firm and maintain their ranks unbroken. Absurd command! as if the frail bark can stem the fury of the Maelstrom because the pilot wills it so. The serried force was broken through in a moment; swords and daggers were instantly bathed in blood;—the contest was too close, too quick, for the use of the soldiers' pikes and lances.

The popular indignation directed itself towards two points,—towards two men, who were the objects of universal abhorrence and detestation.

These were Cæsar Borgia and Michelotto.

Against each of those formidable individuals rushed dense masses of the infuriate multitude; but the intended victims fought like lions at bay.

All order was now destroyed: the regularity of the procession was broken up. The clergy sought refuge in the sacristy of Saint Peter's Chapel; the coffin-bearers hurried towards the portal of the sacred fane; but they were paralysed with fear; for around them was a howling, savage, furious populace, panting for blood. The bearers trembled—their energies failed them: the coffin fell upon the steps of the chapel door; and the corpse of Alexander—swollen, black, and putrid—rolled out upon the pavement.

Oh! what a cry of horror then burst from all those who were near enough to behold that horrid spectacle,—a cry that was taken up and echoed everywhere around,—reverberating along the streets which radiated to the square of Saint Peter,—prolonged far and wide until it resembled the dread expression of a city's dying agony!

Then a solemn silence ensued for a few moments; and even the fighting—the struggling—the attacks upon Cæsar and Michelotto—all ceased. But at the expiration of that brief interval, a general rush took place in the direction of the corpse of the Pope; and then the screams of women and the curses of men bore evidence to the terrific pressure of the crowd. Hundreds were trampled under foot;—yet still the masses moved on, amidst piercing shrieks, wild cries, and horrible anathemas.

And all this time the storm of heaven raged overhead,—the lightning flashing, and the thunder rolling.

The pressure towards the chapel continued for some minutes, until those who were far removed from that spot became aware of the inefficacy of their endeavours to reach it; and then, their original sentiments reviving in full force, they turned to renew their attacks upon Cæsar and Michelotto.

But the temporary cessation of hostilities, caused by the accident to the Pope's coffin, had created an interval long enough to work the safety of the Duke of Valentinois and his faithful sbirro. Not that they had escaped from the crowd—they were too closely hemmed in to admit of flight:—nor that their soldiers had been enabled to effect a diversion in their favour, amidst a populace so rabid—so ferocious—so terrible as that of Rome had now become.

Concealed behind the black drapery which partially covered the balcony of one of the houses overlooking the scene of this extraordinary tumult, Lucreza Borgia was seated with the Count of Aarana.

When the attack commenced upon her brother, she grasped the arm of Faust, exclaiming in a piercing tone, "They will murder him! the wretches will murder him!"

For that woman, with a soul so dark, loved her brother Cæsar more than she had ever loved any of her relatives.

"See—he fights bravely!" returned Faust. "His men endeavour to form a circle around him—"

"Oh! but they are repulsed—they are driven back!" interrupted Lucreza, following all the movements of the hostile parties with looks of the most painful anxiety. "The people are infuriate—they rush on like raging lions—they thirst for his blood! Oh! Faust, must he perish thus before my eyes?"

"Do you believe, Lucreza, that I have power to save him?" demanded the Count, casting upon her a glance which seemed to penetrate to the depths of her soul.

"I know not—I am bewildered—I cannot bear the manifestation of that popular fury," hastily replied Lucreza, the veins in her forehead swollen almost to bursting, and her upper lip—usually so proud in its expression—now quivering convulsively.

"Fear not—I will save him—for your sake," cried the Count of Aarana, pressing her hand; and, without waiting for an answer, he hurried precipitately from the apartment.

Lucreza now watched from the balcony even more anxiously than before. She had certain vague and wild

—but still undefined—ideas concerning Faust; she knew not his terrible secret—but she could not help looking upon him as a being around whom hung a mystery that singularly interested her. She was well aware that he had risen suddenly from the depths of obscurity to the heights of grandeur and prosperity in the German empire;—she had seen the readiness with which he had fulfilled his promise of releasing Walstein and Fritz from the dungeons of Vienna;—she had, moreover, observed with profound surprise that even the most secret occurrences of her family history were well known to him;—and she also knew that he had partaken of some of the poisoned wine at the banquet, without being affected by it in the remotest degree. These circumstances all combined to render him an object of wonder, interest, and even fear in her eyes; and when he declared that he would save her brother, she experienced a strange but inexplicable confidence in this assurance.

Scarcely had Faust left the room when the incident above related occurred at the chapel door; and Lucreza beheld the remains of her father—the corpse of the once terrible Alexander—tossed ignominiously forth, a disgusting object for the public contemplation.

Then all the proud blood of the Borgias rushed to her countenance:—her cheeks became crimson—her eyes flashed fire—her brow contracted with intense, but inveterate, indignation.

In another moment, however, her attention was interested by the sudden cessation of hostilities that followed the loud cry which was taken up through square and street, and from house to house, in the manner already described.

Then she beheld Faust calmly working his way amidst the dense masses towards the spot where her brother was seated on his horse, measuring his late assailants with fierce and bitterly inveterate glances. The Count appeared to move amongst that crowd as if he were a spirit:—he was not jostled—he was not hurried backward and forward with the oscillating sweep of those living waves;—he walked with an air of ease and comfort amidst the tumultuous ocean of people.

But ere he reached the spot where Cæsar stood, the attack on this individual had recommenced in the manner before described; and Michelotto had succeeded in fighting his way up to the very side of his ducal master.

Closely pressed—hemmed in all around—without any apparent avenue of escape, Cæsar fought desperately, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible,—a resolution in which he was seconded by Michelotto. And already was the sbirro's sword dashed from his hands,—already was Cæsar unhorsed,—and in one single moment more the lives of both would have become a sacrifice to that terrible popular wrath,—when a powerful arm, brandishing a naked brand, suddenly hurled back the foremost assailants, and created such a diversion in favour of the Duke and Michelotto that they were enabled to recover themselves.

Then, with a few fatal blows of his death-dealing weapon, Faust cleared a passage for himself and those whom he had rescued. The Duke's sbirri, who perceived this extraordinary and successful feat on the part of a single individual, rallied, and became the assailants instead of the assailed;—a panic fear took possession of the multitudes; and a general flight on the part of the populace ensued. Those who were nearest to Faust and his companions urged forward those who were farther off;—the impetus was thus speedily given to the entire ocean of people; and that portentous tide ebbed from the great square far more rapidly than it had flowed into it—all the radiating streets forming the canals by which those living floods rolled away.

## CHAPTER LVI.

### THE DEMON'S LECTURE.

THE corpse of Alexander VI. lay exposed for some hours on the steps of Saint Peter's Chapel.

When the reaction took place on the part of the multitude, and those masses lately so terrible were pouring away from the heart of the capital into its arteries and veins, in the manner just described, the rumour was rife that an overwhelming hostile force had arrived upon the scene of action. The panic was, therefore, communicated to the members of the Sacred College, the cardinals, the superior and inferior orders of the clergy, the dignitaries, the nobles, the coffin-bearers, the pages, and the menials, who had ere now composed the grand funeral procession. All fled—all abandoned the remains of their late

sovereign;—and the corpse of the Pontiff Alexander was left ignominiously exposed, in its disgusting deformity and loathsome decomposition, at the portal of its intended place of sepulture.

The Borgias were too much occupied with the necessity of ensuring their own safety (for fear of a counter-reaction on the part of the Roman populace) to think of the remains of their father. Lucreza repaired, in the disguise of a priest, to her private house; and Cæsar hastened, with a strong escort of his troops, to the Vatican.

From time to time, when comparative tranquillity was restored throughout the city, a few well-disposed persons approached the remains of the Pope, with the intention of removing them into the chapel: but the countenance was so awful to look upon, that they retreated in affright.

It was about the hour of sunset when Faust was passing in that direction. He stopped close by the corpse; and, gazing on it, exclaimed aloud, "And is this all that is left of the once great and magnificent Pope who made all Europe tremble?"

"What think you of that specimen of the remains of a Sovereign Pontiff?" demanded the deep sonorous voice of the Demon.

"Ah! what, thou here?" ejaculated Faust.

"Where should the epicure be, save at the inviting banquet?" said the Demon, with bitter irony. "Where should the lover be, if not by the side of his mistress? where should the carrion-crow be, save on a corpse? Each and all to the feast they most relish, or by the object which gives them the greatest pleasure. There," continued the Demon, indicating the body with his foot,—"there are the remains of a man who might have made millions happy. His slightest word was a command which produced a positive and instantaneous effect. He stood as it were upon the brink of a river flowing with water that was tasteless; and did he say, '*Pour gall therein*,' or '*Pour honey therein*,' he was immediately obeyed. He might have rendered that river pleasing and grateful to the palate; and he would not the less have been a mighty prince and a powerful ruler. But he said, '*Pour gall therein*;' and a river of bitterness ran through his dominions. The people drank of it, and cursed him. It spread itself out into myriads and myriads of streams, which irrigated all the lands of Christendom; and the people in all those lands have drunk of the bitter waters, and have likewise cursed him."

"Your words are as bitter as the waters of which you figuratively speak," said Faust.

"Are they not true?" demanded the fiend, with a low chuckling laugh;—"are they not true? Oh! what short-sighted fools are mortals! They people my kingdom as if they had a preference for me over One whose name I dare not mention! Again I say, what short-sighted fools are mortals! Take the history of this Pope. He ascended the proudest throne in Christendom; and he saw before him two paths—both departing from the same place, and, though taking different directions, still converging to the same point in the end. One was the right road—the other was the wrong: the point at which they met was the Temple of Fame, Prosperity, Power, and Glory. By what strange infatuation did this miserable Pope take the wrong road; and, having taken it, persist in it? The other was as short and as easy;—oh! yes, believe me,—as short and as easy! And why do so many, many men—whether rulers or mendicants—whether nobles or obscure individuals,—why do they choose the wrong path, in preference to the right? You mortals have an idea that it is more easy to obtain riches, and power, and glory by foul means, than by fair:—and ye are wrong! You mortals conceive that the evil path is the shorter, the more convenient, and the more ready;—and ye are wrong! Yes:—ye are wrong—ye are wrong! I tell you all this, because you are mine—irredeemably mine; and I rejoice in suffering the light of these truths to dawn upon you."

"Say rather, fiend that you are," cried Faust, violently excited,—“say rather that you rejoice to torture me with the conviction that I have resigned Him whose name we neither dare to mention, in order to give my soul to your accursed dominion."

"Perhaps I do rejoice in that too," said the Demon with withering irony. "But listen to me once more. I know that men talk largely and often of the numerous temptations that I spread in their way to ensnare them. They err—I have no need to use so much artifice as they imagine. They become mine of their own accord: they rank themselves under my banner; they become volun-

teers in my service. Were I to proclaim these truths to *them*, I should open their eyes, and lose myriads of victims;—but to you I may say all this. Know, then, Faust, that it is as easy—yes, as easy—to follow the course of virtue as of vice. And why is it as easy? Because it is more pleasant to pursue a path margined with flowers, than one environed with briars. But again I tell you that man obstinately and doggedly chooses the latter. It is not that the path of briars is more easy to pursue;—no—for that is the more easy which is the more pleasant. Ask the thief whether the luxuries purchased by the stolen coin outvalue the crust which he earned by his honest toil? Ask the adulterer and the seducer whether the pleasures of his illicit passion excel the charms of a pure and holy love? Ask the monarch whether he sits the more comfortably on a throne encrusted with the miseries of his people? Ask the man who has plundered the widow and the orphan whether his ill-gotten wealth, which has given him a pillow of down, has brought him lighter slumbers and happier dreams, than in the days of his honest toil when his head reposed on a bolster of hay? And then you mortals have your philosophers—oh! what fine philosophers!—who preach that virtue is not rewarded in this world, nor vice generally punished. They only judge of the exceptions which they see; but those exceptions prove the rule in the opposite sense. They conceive, moreover, that if the wicked escape the vengeance of the law, they escape punishment altogether; and they suppose that because virtue does not become so suddenly wealthy and prosperous as vice, it has not its adequate recompense. Miserable fallacy! Absurd sophistry! Has vice no other punishments than those which outraged laws can inflict? Has virtue no rewards beyond those which mundane aggrandisement can give? Is domestic misery no punishment? Is domestic peace no reward? Is what you mortals term an evil conscience no sting? Is what you denominate a calm conscience no blessing? Oh! Faust, I could dwell upon this topic for hours—because—

“Because, as I am mortal, you rejoice in reproaching me with my short-sightedness,” added the Count, impatiently.

“I will not say that you err, Faust,” exclaimed the Demon, his lip curling with triumph.

“Miserable wretch that I am!” cried the Count. “The longer I live, the more I have reason to repent of the folly—oh! the detestable folly of the compact which I have made with thee. I am not happy, though possessed of all that *earth* can give me to render my life a scene of joy; for there are times when I could dash my head against a stone—did I not know that by so doing I should only give myself up the earlier to thee! Yes, fiend—thou hast said truly—there is a conscience! When seated at the banquet, where the ruby wine crowns the golden goblet, or glitters through the diaphanous crystal, I am not happy. The laugh is on my tongue, or the smile is on my lip—but I am not happy! When pillowed on the bosom of beauty, and reading soft passion in the loveliest eyes that ever looked forth from amidst hyperion looks, I am not happy. No: there is a monitor within which reminds me of all my misdeeds; and a voice—unheard by all others—ever thunders in my ears, ‘*Thou hast sold thyself to Satan!*’”

“And what are your mental sufferings compared with mine?” exclaimed the Demon, a dark cloud passing over his countenance; “the ripple of a stream in contrast with the raging of the boundless ocean! But of that enough. Thou sayest that thy joys are ever poisoned by the reminiscence of thy compact with me? Wouldst thou draw a veil over the past?”

“Ah! your words remind me of a suggestion that Ida once breathed in my ear—a suggestion which had not altogether escaped my memory, but which involves a change of being as it were—a change whereon I have not dared to ponder,” said Faust, in a musing tone. “But, answer me briefly—dost thou possess the power to efface from my mind, during the remainder of my career, the

remembrance of that compact which seals my doom hereafter?”

“There is an island of the Archipelago, in the Mediterranean Sea,” replied the fiend, in a slow and measured tone, “where nature has fashioned a cavern so strange and wonderful that no regal hall built by human hands, and fitted up with innumerable mirrors to give back the lustre of myriad lamps, can compete with it in splendour. And that cavern contains a spring whose pure waters glide amidst a grove of stalactites and crystal spars.”

“And those waters?” asked Faust, in a hesitating manner.

“The Waters of Oblivion!” answered the Demon.

“Oh! give me to drink of those waters!” ejaculated Faust, as earnestly as if he were praying to a good genius: “let me taste of that welcome stream—and then may I enjoy life!”

“To-morrow morning, at sunrise,” answered the Demon, “we will seek the cavern of the Waters of Oblivion!”

With these words the fiend moved slowly away; and Faust watched his tall form until it was lost in the distance and the increasing obscurity of the evening.

Then the Count of Aunau gave way to the joy which he experienced at this prospect of finding oblivion in respect to the past.

“Oblivion!” he exclaimed, “yes, oblivion—deep forgetfulness of all that now makes my life wretched! If I cannot recall the past, at least let me forget it! Let me pursue a career of pleasure and enjoyment—conscious only of possessing a superhuman power that may procure me every gratification, without being forced to tremble at the contemplation of its source! Then—when mine hour comes—it will unveil all its terrors suddenly:—one moment I shall be happy in the midst of all the luxuries of festivity and love—and the next will hurry me into the depths of a fearful eternity. But—in that manner—my enjoyments will not be poisoned until the fatal moment shall arrive; I shall not mark with horror and despair the lapse of each successive day! No—I shall hurry blindly on—confident only of having every wish and every whim gratified, and without knowing wherefore! Oh! then indeed the remaining years of my life will pass joyously away! Yes—let me drink of the Waters of Oblivion:—I shall know no rest until I slake my thirst in the stream of forgetfulness!”

Having thus given vent to the new sentiments which the Demon's promise had awakened within him, Faust turned away from the spot where the corpse of the late Pope yet lay stretched on the steps.

Half an hour afterwards a sexton and his menials repaired to the chapel, and thrusting the dead body into its coffin, conveyed the remains of Alexander VI. to the vault prepared for their reception.

## CHAPTER LVII.

### THE WATERS OF OBLIVION.

THE scene changes to the island of Antiparos—a small but remarkable member of that Archipelago which lies between the coasts of Greece and Anatolia.

Over the beautiful plains and sloping woodlands, moist with the early dew, Faust and the Demon are pursuing their way.

It was one of those charming days for which all animated nature seems to give thanks—the bird chirping upon the bough, the insect humming in the air, the fish disporting in the crystal stream, the flocks browsing in the pasture-lands, and the reptile basking on the sunny bank;—one of those delicious mornings when the most misanthropical heart is allured from its self-erected charnel-house—when the invalid is cheered with a quickening in his languid pulse, a brightening up of the dull eye, and a partial flushing of his marble cheek;—a morn, in fine, when the universe seems surcharged with the spirit of love, and when even tottering decrepitude dreams of life's cheerful glow, and imagines itself to be transported back over the long hill of existence to the garden on the other side—that garden of youth where the sun always shone!

Faust and the Demon continued their way, until they reached a little hill, where a large arch, formed of rough craggy rocks, and overhung with creeping plants, formed the opening of a cavern, whose yawning mouth inspired a gloomy awe.

“Behold the entrance to the famous Grotto of Antiparos!” said the Demon, pausing for a few moments on the threshold. “Within its wild and wonderful recesses has Nature been at work for thousands of years. All that

\* The author hopes that the real object and aim of his tale are thoroughly understood. This is not—or at least is not intended to be—a mere romance without any particular moral in view; but it is written to show the evil consequences of vice and the beauty of virtue. Faust is the type of all evil-doing persons, who morally, though not by written compact, *sell themselves to Satan*. As the tale progresses from the point which it has now reached, the author's aims will become more apparent; and the reader will perceive the peculiar moral illustrated by the contrast existing between Faust and Otto Pianalla.

you will soon see has been fashioned by the slow and steady filtration of waters through the roof, and by the substances which the fluid has borne in its progress amidst permeable rock. But come: I know," added the fiend, with a sardonic chuckle, "that you are longing to taste of the Waters of Oblivion."

The Demon entered the cavern; and Faust boldly followed.

Their course lay through a long, lofty, but narrow alley, into which the daylight penetrated by means of several apertures in the roof. But when they had proceeded about thirty yards, black darkness was before them.

Then, by the power of the Demon, a supernatural lustre suddenly appeared; and the rugged roof and sides of the cavern glittered as if set with myriads of diamonds. The sparry concretions, produced by the dripping of water during a period of almost countless centuries, had assumed the most strange and wondrous forms. Here were the semblances of trees and shrubs, produced in infinite variety,—a petrified grove, combining all existing colours, and receding in due perspective:—there were figures bearing likeness some to the human shape, others to existing animals, and others again to the monsters which pagans have been known to worship.

In a little while the Demon led Faust to the brink of a profound precipice,—an abyss so terrific that a common mortal would have started back in horror.

But Faust knew none of those fears which were the characteristics of his fellow-creatures; and he hesitated not to plunge into the gulf in imitation of the example of his guide.

From the bottom of the abyss another cavern branched off, like the gallery horizontally excavated from the foot of a mine-shaft; and overhead was a ridge of rugged rocks, vast pieces of which jutted out so far that it was necessary to creep beneath them.

But, guided by means of the supernatural light, Faust pursued his way in safety, in the track of the Demon.

Another precipice was soon reached—a precipice more profound and terrible than the former one.

Into this second abyss they plunged—and a second horizontal cavern, rugged and dangerous, was entered. It was now necessary to keep entirely on one side; for on the other was a series of dark pits and caves, yawning, like so many monstrous wells, as if in readiness to swallow up for ever the unwary intruder in those subterranean laboratories of nature.

Presently the cavern sloped obliquely, growing more and more precipitate as Faust and the Demon advanced, until it became perfectly perpendicular, thus forming a third precipice more dangerous than the two preceding ones.

The walls of this gulf were solid masses of red marble, covered with white sprigs and spars of rock crystal. As the supernatural light illumined those wondrous depths, the effect, with the glow of the purple from behind, was that of one immense sheet of amethysts.

A slanting vault led Faust and his infernal guide into a wide passage of rough coarse stone, where the stalactical concretions had assumed the forms of snakes, all coiled round, and apparently ready to dart from their resting-places. There also were magnificent pillars of glittering yellow marble; and the roof seemed hung with icicles, transparent as glass, and yet as solid as flint. The floor was of marble; and, in different places, incrustations of white spar had taken the appearances of thrones, altars, and pedestals bearing crowns—as if Nature, in her wild and marvellous frolic, had studied to mock the richest achievements of human art!

From this splendid chamber another low and rugged cavern led to another precipice, making the fourth and last which it was necessary to plunge into to gain the portico of the gorgeous temple which that Grotto contained.

The abyss led to a cavern, the bottom of which was plain and even; but after proceeding forty or fifty yards, it gave admission into a long alley, the sides and roof of which were of black marble without a single incrustation.

Suddenly the supernatural light disappeared, and Faust found himself in total darkness.

"Fear nothing," said the deep-toned voice of the Demon: "you will better appreciate the marvels you are about to behold, if you merge from utter obscurity into the grand hall of splendour and magnificence."

Taking the hand of Faust, the Demon led him onward for a short distance: then, bidding him step over a large stone which seemed the threshold of a portico, he conducted him only a few paces farther.

Relinquishing Faust's hand suddenly, the Demon exclaimed, "Behold!"—and at the same instant the supernatural lustre reappeared, but with increased intenseness and brilliancy.

Then what a wondrous and magnificent spectacle broke upon the view of the astonished Count of Aaraua!

He was standing in a grotto a hundred and twenty yards long, a hundred and ten yards wide, and upwards of sixty yards in height;—a grotto far, far below the surface of the earth, and which Nature had hollowed and embellished with her own hands.

And those embellishments—how ineffably grand, how indescribably splendid were they!

Above his head was a mighty vaulted roof, formed of crystallized white marble, hung as it were with icicles, many of them ten feet long, and a foot in diameter at the thickest part. To these seemed suspended myriads of festoons of leaves, flowers, and creeping plants—all formed of stalactites which reflected the light to such a degree of brilliancy as to dazzle the eyes. The sides of this magnificent pavilion appeared to be shaded with trees of white marble, rising in rows above each other, and seeming the real shrubs of the vegetable kingdom covered with snow. And, again—from tree to tree, as from icicle to icicle on the roof—hung beautiful festoons and garlands in countless quantities; and on the floor the marble concretions wound in elegant meanders amidst the dark soil—so that the vast and level bottom of the grotto appeared to be irrigated with numerous streams.

In the midst of this wonderful temple stood a petrifaction in the shape of an altar, about fifteen feet high, six long, and two broad. Around this natural table rose upwards of a dozen spiral stalactites, varying from twenty to thirty feet in height, and appearing like candlesticks. Other concretions strikingly represented the customary ornaments of a Roman Catholic altar-piece.

Nor was this all of the wonderful which Nature had achieved and combined to perfect the sacred resemblance of the central petrifaction in that temple. For some distance all around the altar short crystals of endless variety of colour were growing out of the floor in an irregular manner; the general appearance being that of a magnificent carpet spread about the sacred shrine.

Such were the wonders of the Grotto of Antiparos:—such are its marvels still.

And no human agency has hollowed one single inch of those caverns within caverns, and precipices following precipices—nor of the great pavilion to which they all lead:—nor has any mortal hand ever aided in the crystallization of a single stalactite. Nature has achieved it all,—hollowed the caves with such strange regularity, so that the abysses may be deemed shafts and the caverns galleries in a vast mine excavated upon fixed and pre-arranged principles;—and Nature has also fashioned those myriads of marble icicles, trees, groves, rivers, festoons, garlands, thrones, pedestals, crowns, candlesticks, and altars!

The Count of Aaraua was lost in amazement at all he beheld; for the effect of the whole scene was wonderfully enhanced by the flood of brilliant lustre with which the Demon had filled the grotto.

"What think you of this temple which Nature has formed without object and without aim?" demanded the Demon, as he leant against the crystal mass of petrifaction which we have denominated the altar.

"I am bewildered with amazement!" exclaimed Faust. "Had mortal hands hollowed these caverns, and mortal ingenuity studied how to produce the most startling effects, how miserably would both have failed in comparison with this stupendous work which Nature has achieved without design—without principles."

"Like all short-sighted mortals, you cannot comprehend the tools with which Nature labours," returned the Demon. "In the ocean she raises entire islands by means of the coral insect;—here she has fashioned this wondrous grotto by the simple process of the filtration of water:—by means of fire she changes the species of matter existing in the entrails of the earth, and converts solids into fluids;—in the vast chains of mountains upon the surface of this globe, she works with the earthquake, the avalanche, the torrent, and the storm;—and in the boundless regions of space she is ever toiling at the production of new worlds."

"And are those other worlds of which we catch glimpses from this globe of ours,—are they inhabited by mortal beings like ourselves?" demanded Faust.

"I will tell you more on this subject at a future time," said the Demon. "Yes—on some fitting occasion—I will

teach you the secrets of cosmogony which no common mortal will ever completely solve,—those mysteries concerning the origin of worlds, and globes, and stars, which have perplexed philosophers in all ages that are past, and will embarrass them throughout all ages that are to come. But this is not the season—this is not the place—this is not the hour. You came hither—for what?”

And as he uttered these words, the Demon fixed his eyes, with snake-like fascination, upon Faust.

“For what did I come hither?” exclaimed the Count. “Oh! most assuredly not to gratify my curiosity with the view of a grotto, however wonderful be its formation,—nor to feast my eyes with the natural beauties of a cavern, however brilliant be those embellishments! No—mine was a far more important aim: I am here,” he added firmly, “to seek the Waters of Oblivion.”

“They flow near at hand, Faust,” returned the Demon; and, as he spoke, he advanced towards the grove of stalactites at the farther end of the grotto.

Faust followed him, and, guided by his motions, attentively examined the rows of petrified trees in that part of the mighty temple.

“Behold the waters which you thirst for!” said the Demon, indicating a particular spot with his hand, while his countenance assumed an expression so unutterably sardonic—so ineffably fiend-like, that had Faust beheld it, he—even he—would have quailed and trembled.

But the Count of Aurana was deeply intent on searching with his eager eyes for the promised spring; and when he beheld a pure current winding its limpid way in a course which it had hollowed for itself on the rugged surface of a mass of solid marble, his joy knew no bounds.

The stream trickled from amidst the petrifications in a corner of the grotto; and, after meandering through the stalactite groves the whole length of one side of the immense cavern, it suddenly disappeared beneath a small overhanging crag of spars.

“Behold the waters that you thirst for!” again ejaculated the Demon, placing his hand on Faust’s shoulder.

“Let me drink of them without delay—let me cool my lips, parched with the fires of worldly passions, at that delicious spring!” cried the Count, advancing still nearer to the limpid stream.

“One moment!” said the Demon, holding him back. “Hast thou well reflected on the step thou art about to take?”

“Reflection!” repeated Faust, scornfully: “what need have I for reflection—what reason for hesitation, when I can drink oblivion of the past, and thenceforth enter on a career of pleasure unalloyed by vain regrets and useless epinings?”

“Fool!” cried the Demon, in his cold and implacable manner; “there is an immense necessity for reflection! In drinking the Waters of Oblivion, you not only steep in forgetfulness all those memories which remind you of what you were, and upbraid you with what you are;—but you also lose sight of your own identity! You will go forth from this cavern a being but one remove above the brute—unable to read—all your learning lost—all your look-lore forgotten—all your experience annihilated! You will not even remember a language wherewith to express your new ideas! You will be like a child just born, but with a full development of physical powers and the reality of speech: your mind will be a parchment cleansed of all the characters once traced upon it!”

“Are these the effects of the Waters of Oblivion?” demanded Faust, shrinking back with profound horror from the spring that had ere now captivated his vision.

“How could those effects be otherwise?” said the Demon, with an insulting laugh. “Poets may rave of the blessings which would accrue to the human race, were such a Lethæan spring accessible to the spirit-broken and life-weary;—poor miserable mortals may exclaim, in the bitterness of their sorrows, ‘Oh! for oblivion of the past!’—but they know not what they eulogise, nor what they ask for.”

“Have you then become my moral teacher?” demanded Faust, turning abruptly towards the Demon.

“No,” was the calm and deliberate answer; “but I take delight in exposing the circumstances of mortal shortsightedness. My destiny is to war with the human race—to make them wretched as well as criminal—to punish them with their failings as well as to help them in the career of their vices. To me it is a source of boundless joy—of indescribable delight, to witness that disappointment and that ill-subdued rage which have succeeded your exuberant happiness and insane pleasure in the presence of this limpid but fatal spring!”

“Wherefore hold the cup to my lips, and then dash it so rudely away?” cried Faust, grinding his teeth with vexation and wrath.

“Your question, Faust,” replied the Demon, “involves the whole mystery of my existence! Were I to answer you truly, I should explain the origin of that hatred—a hatred as unquenchable as the fires of my kingdom—which I entertain for mankind. But on this subject my lips are sealed. Come: hast thou seen enough of the Grotto of Antiparos?”

“Too much—too much,” returned Faust, almost wildly; “would that I had never entertained such fond hopes—to have them so cruelly destroyed! Yes—I have seen enough of this wondrous cavern. Let us depart!”

“Whither wilt thou proceed?” demanded the fiend. “This is a busy day at Rome.”

“True—the election of a Pope!” cried the Count. “Transport me thither!”

The Demon seized the hand of Faust, from whose eyes the splendours of the grotto suddenly disappeared—and in another moment he was standing, alone, in the streets of the Eternal City.

## CHAPTER LVIII.

CÆSAR BORGIA AND FATHER ANSELM.

THE great square of Saint Peter was once more crowded with the populace of Rome.

The Sacred Colleges had assembled in solemn conclave in the council chamber of the Vatican, to elect a new Pope.

Thirty-six cardinals were there gathered together in a large apartment, the door of which had been bricked up, and the window of the balcony whence the election was to be proclaimed had been closed by a stout boarding, perforated with holes to admit the light and air. These precautions were adopted in order to prevent the exercise of any undue influence through the medium of communication between the conclave and those without.

The eyes of the vast multitude assembled in the square were all turned upwards; and the point of concentration for those myriads of visual rays was the summit of a chimney standing immediately over the apartment where the thirty-six cardinals were gathered.

It was now eleven o’clock in the forenoon; and a sensation of deep curiosity and breathless suspense pervaded the crowd.

Scarcely had the bell of Saint Peter’s Chapel tolled the hour, when a fleecy vapour—a faint line of smoke such as may be seen ascending from some rural cottage in a mild summer evening—rose from the chimney of the Vatican.

Then murmurs of dissatisfaction emanated from the multitude; and these were followed here and there with shouts of derisive laughter; for that smoke was a proof that the ballot-lists were burnt—that the cardinals had not decided the election—that Rome was still without a sovereign, and the Christian world without a Pontiff!

It was therefore evident that the cardinals would proceed to a new ballot, the result of which would not be known until five in the afternoon.

But in the meantime the holy fathers must dine; and the ceremony of conveying the repast to the conclave was calculated to exercise a greater influence on their proceedings than may at first appear.

We must, however, request the reader to accompany us a little while to the palace of Cæsar Duke of Valentinois.

This important personage, in pursuance of a pacific arrangement with the rival factions of Orsino and Colonna, had left the Vatican and returned to his own princely abode, so that his presence in the papal palace might not overawe the cardinals in the election of a Pontiff.

Cæsar was pacing a handsome saloon with agitated steps, when Micheletto entered, shortly after eleven o’clock.

“What tidings?” demanded the Duke, impatiently.

“The ballot-lists are burnt,” was the answer.

“Perdition!” ejaculated Cæsar; “then the conclave is equally divided: Julian de la Rovere and Francesco Piccolomini have each the same chance! But my word is pledged to the latter—and my safety depends on his success! One single vote gained from Rovere’s party will give the majority to Piccolomini.”

“Is not Cardinal Venturo devoted to Rovere?” asked Micheletto.

“Assuredly he is,” said the Duke. “But, ha! I understand you:—the cardinal is accessible to a gift—a princely



gift. Thank you for the hint, Michelotto; it shall be forthwith acted upon!"

The Duke hastened to a bureau, and took thence a small coffer, the contents of which he displayed to his faithful sbirro.

"Gold chains of massive weight—precious stones of enormous value—and rings of Parisian workmanship," exclaimed Michelotto. "That treasure, my lord, will purchase a dozen cardinals."

"And, in order to be certain of success, it shall be devoted to the purchase of only one," said Caesar, smiling triumphantly. "Take this coffer to Cardinal Ventura's mistress, Nisida Marino, and obtain her acknowledgment of its receipt. She must, moreover, enumerate the contents, and specify the value she sets upon them. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, my lord;"—and Michelotto departed with the precious casket.

Almost immediately after the sbirro had retired Father Anselm—the Superior of the Capuchins' Convent in the Julian Alps—entered the room.

"What hath brought thee to Rome, good father?" inquired the Duke, when the usual greetings were briefly disposed of. "Methought thou wast busy elsewhere with matters concerning the Holy Vehm?"

"I have travelled to Rome, my lord," was the reply, "because your Highness's promise is yet unfulfilled,—because the see of a prelate is now vacant in your principality of the Romagna,—and because it is time to reward a faithful servant, who has long toiled in behalf of your family."

"That prelacy is not mine to give, holy father," returned Caesar.

"If Alexander VI. be no more, your Highness is still Prince of the Romagna," exclaimed Anselm, firmly.

"True!" observed the Duke, coldly; "but the prelacy of which you speak is promised to Cardinal Trespolo, who will vote for Francesco Piccolomini."

"Then are my services to go still unrewarded?" said Anselm, a dark cloud passing over his countenance. "Think, my lord, how long and faithfully I have served you—how willingly I have made the Holy Vehm of Germany the instrument of your designs—how steadily I have enhanced the interests of the Borgias by means of the numerous agents at my command."

"I am not unmindful of your great services, holy father," was the answer: "nor have I been altogether ungrateful. Thou hast had gold from my purse at times when I could ill spare it: and since the dawn of my prosperity, those subsidies have neither been few nor insignificant. If thou hast need of more now, speak frankly—and my treasury is open to you, as was once my poor purse."

"My lord, I require not recompense of that kind," said the priest, warmly; "I solicit—nay, I demand—the fulfilment of that promise—"

"Promise!" ejaculated the Duke, now seriously irritated by Anselm's importunity. "Yes—I did promise you some such boon as you mention:—but it was over the wine cup—and such pledges are of no more value in the eyes of sensible men than the pledges of another kind which are also the companions of the sparkling glass."

"I am at length to understand, then, that your Highness has promised what there was no intention to fulfil?" said Father Anselm, biting his lip.

"Understand what you will," said Caesar, roughly; "but importune me not at present. I am tormented with anxiety relative to the pending election;—I am slowly recovering from the effects of poison imbibed by a misadventure;—and at this moment all my best interests—perhaps my life—are trembling in the balance. Is this, then, a season to torment me with your importunities?"

"Beware, my lord, how you make an enemy of me!" cried Anselm, solemnly. "It is precisely because your interests are thus hovering in the scale of uncertainty that I demand the fulfilment of your oft-repeated pledge."

"Thou speakest well, most disinterested monk!" ejaculated Caesar scornfully. "Thou hast not even the decency to keep the veil over the selfishness of thy motives. Thou thinkest it as probable that my fall is near as that my elevation may be secured; and thus thou wouldst take advantage of the few moments of power that may still be mine! 'Tis well—thou hast thrown aside the mask—and I defy thee!"

"Again I say 'Beware,' my lord!" cried Anselm, scarcely able to subdue his resentment.

"And of whom should I beware?" demanded Caesar, proudly: "of you, who are doomed to conceal your identity beneath the cowl of a monk,—of you—a wretch that has passed through the hands of the public executioner,—a resuscitated corpse—"

"Hold, my lord!" exclaimed Anselm, furiously; and at the same moment his hand clutched a dagger beneath his black cloak: "hold, my lord! Your Highness touches upon dangerous ground! Declare war between us—and it will be a war to the knife—a war between two men who know not child's play,—a war which on my part would be waged against all your family;—and you know that my means and resources are not contemptible."

"Listen, Anselm," said Caesar Borgia; "menaces will effect naught with me. The prelacy is offered elsewhere, and cannot be yours. Neither will I give you place or power in the Romagna, since you dare to threaten me. But let us understand each other. Your means to work mischief are great—so are mine: your resources may be vast—but mine are more extensive. Do you boast of your bravos of the Vehm? Look at my sbirri! Perhaps you imagine that I tremble lest you should reveal certain secrets which have been communicated to you relative to me and mine? You dare not breathe a word that will do me an injury; for at the first syllable of slander which passes your lips—that moment do I proclaim to the world the strange, the astounding fact that the individual who passes as Father Anselm—the Superior of the Capuchins' Convent in the Julian Alps—the Free Count of the Vehmgericht in the southern district of Carniola,—that this man is—"

"Enough—enough, my lord!" ejaculated Anselm. "Our secrets are mutually safe:—in all other respects it is now war to the knife!"

And with these words the Chief of the Holy Vehm hurried from the apartment.

Caesar laughed scornfully as he thought of the pretensions of the priest and the manner in which he had baffled them.

In a short time Michelotto returned, triumph expressed in his dark eyes and on his curling lip.

"Thou hast succeeded!" exclaimed the Duke of Valentino.

"Yes, my lord," was the reply. "The beautiful Nisida Marino has accepted the gift of your Highness, and has expressed her gratitude in terms suitable to the purpose of your lordship."

"Prate not thus lengthily, good Michelotto. Give me the receipt—for such indeed it is. There! 'Tis well—she estimates the jewels at the worth of five thousand ducats. Now away to the Vatican, Michelotto; and conclude this important affair. You are well aware that at three o'clock a portion of the brickwork of the closed door of the Cardinals' chamber will be removed in order to permit the service of their Eminences' dinners?"

"If I mistake not, my lord," observed the sbirro, "the meals are conveyed in baskets, each sealed with the armorial bearings of the cardinal for whom it is intended?"

"Rightly spoken, good Michelotto," returned the Duke. "But before the baskets leave the kitchen of the Vatican, they are inspected by the Bishop of Parma; and it is also his duty to impose the seals. The Bishop, as you well know, is devoted to my interests: hasten thou to him—greet him cordially on my part—and see that Nisida Marino's billet be placed in the basket intended for Cardinal Ventura."

"All shall be done as your Highness has directed," replied the sbirro, with a low bow; and he immediately proceeded to execute his master's orders.

The Bishop of Parma was well disposed towards Caesar Borgia; and the receipt of Nisida Marino was unhesitatingly placed beneath the delicate white napkin that covered the dishes contained in Cardinal Ventura's basket.

Thirty-six domestics, in gorgeous liveries, conveyed the thirty-six baskets from the kitchen of the Vatican to the door of the Council Chamber, the procession being led by the Bishop of Parma.

In the ante-room leading to the Council Chamber were two masons provided with the implements of their craft. The moment the Bishop of Parma made his appearance at the head of the cavalcade of domestics, those operatives instantly began to remove a portion of the brickwork which walled up the door:—then the door itself was opened by one of the Sacred Conclave within, and the baskets were passed through the aperture by the servants who had charge of them. The moment this ceremony was completed, the masons restored the brickwork to its

former state; and the procession of domestics, the operatives, and the Bishop withdrew.

The day wore on; and towards five o'clock the multitudes had increased to such a degree in the neighbourhood of the Vatican, that every other part of Rome was completely deserted.

The bell of Saint Peter's Chapel tolled five—and the sound was echoed from every other steeple and tower within the precincts of the Eternal City.

Once more did the chimney above the Council Chamber attract every eye;—and again was curiosity most acute—suspense even painful.

The hour was proclaimed—the bells ceased—and a few minutes elapsed.

"There is no smoke!" exclaimed many tongues; "and Rome has at length a new Pontiff!"

But suddenly every voice was once more hushed;—a dead silence prevailed amongst the crowd; and all eyes were fixed upon the closed window to which the balcony of the Council Chamber belonged.

Several of the boards were detached from the wood-work over the casement; and at length an aperture was made, large enough to permit a man to advance from the interior of the Council Chamber to the front of the balcony.

This was Cardinal Venturo himself.

The most profound and death-like stillness pervaded the multitude: it seemed strange that so enormous a mass of living beings could remain so tranquil—so silent—so perfectly noiseless.

Then Cardinal Venturo spoke in a loud tone.

"It is my pleasing duty to announce to you tidings of great joy. The most Eminent, Holy, and Reverend Signor Francesco Piccolomini, Cardinal of Sienna, has been chosen Sovereign Pontiff, and has assumed the denomination of Pius III."

Then burst from the Roman people a shout—a tremendous shout of applause and satisfaction; and the welcome tidings were speedily communicated to the Duke of Valentinois in his palace, and to Lucreza Borgia in her private dwelling.

## CHAPTER LIX.

### THE COLISEUM OF ROME.

WHEN Father Anselm left the presence of the Duke of Valentinois in the manner described in the preceding chapter, he muffled himself in his ecclesiastical habit in such a way as to conceal his countenance, and hastened rapidly through the streets towards the ruins of the Coliseum.

That grand amphitheatre—a fallen memorial of the ancient greatness of Rome—is still an object, the immensity of which awes and astounds the traveller who beholds it for the first time.

Even the splendour of the Papal Majesty is not calculated to produce more dazzling, nor, on the other hand, more solemn impressions than that stupendous spectacle which to the stranger's excited imagination seems to wim before him as a cloud.

The heathen Romans were accustomed to compel the primitive votaries of the Gospel to combat with wild beasts within those vast precincts; and Catholic devotion has placed on the ruins of the pile the following inscription:—"DEFILED BY THE IMPURE WORSHIP OF PAGANS: PURIFIED BY THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS."

This truly sublime structure is nearly two thousand feet in circumference. Four ranges of pillars rise above one another; but the lowest row has sunk deep into the soil.

Tradition says that thirty thousand captive Jews raised the mighty pile; nor did the architectural proficiency and colossal conceptions of those workmen dishonour their predecessors—the builders of Solomon's Temple.

Dedicated by the Emperor Vespasian to the popular diversion, the Coliseum was used as a circus for the combats of wild beasts. The interior was capable of accommodating eighty thousand spectators; and ancient historians declare that as many as five thousand ferocious animals frequently fought at one time within the vast enclosure.

The reign of the Emperor Titus was a glorious one for the Coliseum. It was he who introduced those formidable conflicts between the savage inhabitants of the

forest that were imported to Rome in such vast numbers for the purpose. When the battles were over, a sluice was opened,—the arena became an immense lake,—ships were launched,—and two fleets represented a naval combat.

But the luxury of ancient Rome was then almost at its height, and the ladies of the Imperial City were as delicate and as susceptible of unpleasant sensations from the noxious vapours arising from such a mighty assemblage of people, as our most fashionable fair ones could possibly be at the present day. To counteract those unpleasant effects, sweet-scented water and wine mixed with saffron and spice were showered down from a grated work above, on the heads of the people. There were, however, no velvet collars nor beaver hats to spoil—no Parisian bonnets nor dresses of delicate textures to stain.

When the barbarians besieged and stormed the Imperial City, they spared the Coliseum:—the Christian Pontiffs were less considerate. Pope Paul II. appropriated a part of the massive masonry to the construction of the palace of Saint Mark: Cardinal Riario devoted another section of the mighty edifice to the building of the Papal Chancery; and Paul III. made a farther inroad on a structure which even Goths and Vandals had not dared to touch, for the purpose of providing materials for the Farnese Palace.

Nevertheless, there remains even at the present day, enough of the Coliseum,—in spite of those monstrous dilapidations,—to inspire the beholder with awe, and furnish him with a good idea of the original. Vast masses of stone appear to have been placed one upon another, with the nicest reference to architectural precision—with the most faultless observance of uniformity—and yet without the use of either mortar or cement. Thousands and thousands of years may yet pass by, and add new dates to the annals of time; and the remnants of that structure will continue to exist, if the hands of man consent to spare them!

When Father Anselm entered those colossal ruins,—imposing as the Pyramids of Egypt, and telling as many strange tales of ancient magnificence and lost art as the remains of Tadmor,—the moon shone upon them; and its flood of silver light irradiated the blackened stone. Streaming through arches—between pillars—and amidst the interstices of half-loosened masses, that pure lustre showed all the outlines of the colossal ruins which stood out in such bold relief against the purple sky. Here were huge overhanging blocks that appeared to be held in the air by invisible beings,—their projecting sections of arches without support,—everywhere an edifice that seemed to hang together in a manner defying all the demonstrated rules of gravitation.

Around the interior of that portion of the Coliseum which still exists, vessels of holy water are suspended; and in the centre is a huge crucifix, on the transverse beam of which are written these words:—"Whoso approacheth this holy emblem with a contrite heart, to him shall be given a dispensation from sin during a hundred days."

Father Anselm pursued his way amidst the ruins, guided by the moonlight; and, advancing towards a spot where a portion of dead wall threw a dark shadow on the ground, he aroused from their slumbers two men who were stretched in their cloaks on the hard soil.

"Who goes?" cried one, starting up.

"It is I," answered Anselm. "Speak not so loudly, good Fritz; for certain pious monks frequently visit these ruins by night, to pray for the souls of those Christians who were martyrs to heathen persecutions in ancient times. Rouse your companion Walstein; I have business on hand."

"I am here—and awake, holy father," said the impostor, who had so ably played the part of the Baron of Czernin. "What news with the Borgia?"

"Cæsar is a traitor to his word, and I will serve him no more," replied Anselm, in a savage tone. "He offered me gold—but of that I have no need. I demanded the prelacy—and that he refused me. I must now punish him as he deserves."

"Had you not rather take the gold, since you cannot obtain the prelacy, holy father?" demanded Gregory Walstein.

"Seek not to reason with me on this subject," exclaimed Anselm, impatiently. "It is sufficient for thee that thou receivest from my hands the reward of thy services. I would sooner wreak my just vengeance on the Borgia than become the possessor of all his wealth. Aye—and not only against him shall my wrath be levelled, but

\* Dio Cassius says nine thousand.

against all in whom he feels an interest—against everyone who is near or dear to him—against his relatives, his friends, and his servitors,—even against the memory of his father!”

“And while we are wasting our time in Rome, the governor of Laybach may march against the convent,” said Walstein, doggedly: “then, if Karl, Conrade, and the rest should be caught napping,—our stronghold falls into the hands of the enemy.”

“I have good and sufficient reason for feeling secure on that head,” observed Anselm. “The Cord and Dagger produced so wondrous an effect upon the Emperor, that not all the interest of the Baron of Czernin could induce his Majesty to despatch another messenger to the governor of Laybach in respect to hostile proceedings against the convent. No,” continued Anselm, proudly, “the terrors of the Holy Vehm appal even monarchs; and Maximilian is not a prince who will place his life unnecessarily in danger. He knows full well that the same hand which placed a dagger on the table in his private chamber; may strike him when he sleeps:—he is not ignorant of the nature of the ties which bind all the brethren of the Secret Tribunals so closely together; nor is he unaware of the fidelity with which every member of our fraternity executes the commands of his superior—even though these commands ordain a deed the execution of which is certain to lead to the death of its perpetrator as well as of its victim.”

“Then the convent is safe,” said Walstein; “and I shall now obey your orders all the more readily in consequence of this assurance. As for my worthy companion Fritz, he hears everything without troubling himself about a why or a wherefore.”

“And you would do well to follow my example,” said Fritz, in a surly tone. “Let those who have got good heads, dictate: and let those who have only strong arms and stout hearts, but no brains, obey. Had you followed these maxims, you would not have involved yourself in such peril at Vienna: the Baron would still be a prisoner in the convent; and no suspicion would ever have attached itself to the stronghold nor its inhabitants. Now all the secrets of the private issues and avenues are known; and it can serve no other purpose than a mere fortress wherein to shut ourselves up in the time of danger.”

“You undertake to reproach me for want of brains, Messer Fritz,” exclaimed Walstein, angrily: “know you not that the part I played so well does infinite credit to my intelligence? I will only appeal to his reverence—”

“Cease this prating, Gregory!” ejaculated Father Anselm, sternly. “The mischief of which Fritz complains is done, and cannot be repaired; nor do I wish that the past should be perpetually flung in your teeth. If there be one point in your conduct which irritated me more than another, it was the pertinacity wherewith you clung to your own selfish interests—retaining all the wealth of the Baron von Czernin for your pleasures and extravagances, and never devoting a single fraction to the service of the Holy Vehm or the maintenance of the convent. But once more, Gregory,” continued Anselm, “I declare my will that the past be forgotten; and you, good Fritz, will be forthwith mindful of the same.”

“Your reverence can command me in all respects,” said the old mountaineer.

“Tis well,” observed Anselm. “*Vengeance against the Borgias*, is now my motto. When that ungrateful family shall be punished according to its deserts, we shall have no farther business to retain us in Rome. Certain matters in the German Empire will next claim my attention. The Holy Vehm has marked Otto Pianalla for its victim:—dearly shall he pay for that daring which led him so insolently to tear aside the veil which concealed the secrets of the convent. The Italian, Mazzini, was a mere instrument in his hands: and the Vehm will not deign to notice the share he had in that business.”

“And Dame Mildreda?” said Fritz, interrogatively.

“Too contemptible to occupy our attention,” returned Anselm; “whereas Otto Pianalla is energetic, daring, virtuous, and honourable—therefore eminently dangerous. He must be cited, judged, and punished according to the usual forms. So soon as that matter shall have been duly disposed of, it is my intention to journey towards the Elbe.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Fritz, starting: “to visit our old master, Count Manfred of Linsdorf?”

“Thou hast rightly divined my object, good Fritz,” returned Anselm: “and it will be necessary for thee to accompany me. I have recently made a discovery which

places that haughty lord in my power: dost understand me, Fritz?”

“Can it be possible that your reverence has been enabled to find a trace of that child—”

“Child!” exclaimed Father Anselm: “do you forget the lapse of years, Fritz? She is now a young woman—grown up in beauty, and conducted by the most extraordinary destinies to a position, which—But of that no matter now: I have much to impart to thee when we are alone.”

“If I am one too many,” said Walstein, in a surly tone, “I will remove to a distance.”

“Nay—chafe not because I am prudent, Gregory,” ejaculated Anselm. “You know full well that in your wine-cups even the secrets of the Vehm are scarcely safe in your keeping.—But, as I was observing, good Fritz,” continued the priest, “it will behove you to accompany me on my visit to Linsdorf Castle. The haughty Count will scarcely recognise his once faithful Hugo beneath thy grey hairs.”

“Haply not, your reverence,” observed Fritz. “Time works marvellous changes in our appearance as well as in our conditions. At the period to which your reverence alludes, you yourself were but a humble dependant of the Lord of Linsdorf; and now you are a Free Count of the Holy Vehm, and as powerful as himself. It seems but yesterday that you succeeded me in the duty of guarding the poor lady—”

“Silence, Fritz!” exclaimed Anselm, sternly. “Those are secrets—deep secrets—which must not be discussed now. The time is not yet come—but it is near at hand. On my return to Germany I shall doubtless receive a rescript from the Supreme Council of Westphalia ordaining the deposition of the Lord of Linsdorf from his high post of Free Count in the district of Wittenberg. The numerous errors—the gross faults—the manifold indiscretions which have marked his long career of local power, as a chief of the Holy Vehm, can be no longer tolerated by that august Council which controls the League throughout the German Empire. It will be my duty to depose and perhaps punish that proud Count who so ill rewarded your services and mine. But of this enough for the present: Walstein is growing impatient, because I have alluded to matters with which he is not conversant.”

“I care little about that, your reverence,” said Gregory; “but I am anxious to receive any instructions that you may have to communicate, instead of loitering amongst these old ruins which seem every moment ready to fall and crush us.”

“Say, rather, that you are desirous of hurrying to the tavern, and draining a bottle of wine with the idlers of Rome,” exclaimed Father Anselm, sternly. “However, I will not keep either of you here many minutes longer. Listen, then, to my instructions. You, Fritz, will repair to the palace of the Lord Fabio Orsino, and demand an audience of that noble. The mere mention of my name—‘*Father Anselm*’—will insure you immediate access to him. Say to his lordship that the time is near at hand for the destruction of the Borgias; and that in twenty-four days from the present time two hundred members of the Carniolan Vehm will be dispersed throughout this city, ready to collect together at an hour’s warning, and take part against the Borgias. And do you, Walstein,” continued Father Anselm, taking a scroll from beneath his ecclesiastical garb,—“do you repair to the Chapel of Saint Peter, and affix this parchment to the door. My vengeance must commence with the desecration of the name of Alexander Borgia. These missions executed on both your parts, you will have naught to do save to divert yourselves as best ye may in this city of luxury and pleasure, for twenty-three days, during which I shall be absent. In the evening of the twenty-third day you will meet me here again: our brethren will have reached the city by that time; and it will only remain for you to collect them together in the manner which I shall explain to you. Then,” added Anselm, “we will aid the Orsini in striking a blow that shall exterminate the Borgias. And, remember, my friends—Fabio Orsino is no niggard with his gold!”

Having thus imparted his instructions to Fritz and Walstein, Father Anselm took his departure from the ruins of the Coliseum.

A few minutes afterwards, Fritz and Walstein separated, and repaired each to execute his special mission.

Early on the following morning, a crowd was collected at the door of Saint Peter’s Chapel. The object of interest was a parchment affixed to the entrance of the papal burying-place.

Upon the scroll were traced the following lines in bold and clear characters :—

"VENDIT ALEXANDER CLAVES, ALTARIA, CHRISTUM;—  
EMERAT ILLE PRIUS, VENDERE JURE POTEST."\*

The crowd were keenly alive to the justice and point of this terrible satire upon the deed; and the effect was precisely that which Father Anselm had foreseen. The two lines contained truths which confirmed in their suspicions those persons who had already entertained doubts relative to the priest-vaunted sanctity of the late Pope; and yells of execration, shouts of derision, and even cries of vengeance on the surviving Borgias burst from the multitude.

But suddenly the crowd was forcibly divided; and a man, rushing through the mass, darted up to the church door. Tearing down the scroll, he rent it into a hundred fragments, which he cast indignantly in the faces of those hooting, screaming people.

Then, drawing his sword, he again made himself a passage amidst the crowd; and so fierce were his looks—so glaring the fire of his eyes—and so impressive his air of authority, that not a hand was raised to bar his way.

This daring exploit—the only one calculated to overawe the multitude, and prevent an explosion of popular indignation—was performed by Cæsar Borgia.

But at a distance was Michelotto, with a band of condottieri, ready to fly to the aid of his master in case of necessity.

## CHAPTER LX.

### THE BORGIAS AND THE ORSINI.

In the morning of the twenty-fourth day from the one whose incidents were detailed in the two preceding chapters—and at that hour when the grey twilight heralds the advent of the sun—a band of two hundred men, all Germans, and well armed, had congregated amongst the ruins of the Coliseum.

Father Anselm, Gregory Walstein, and the mountaineer Fritz, was at their head.

The moment the bright disc of the sun was seen above the eastern horizon, this force was put in motion—advancing towards the palace of Cæsar Borgia.

As they passed along the streets, they were joined by other armed men—Italians—who issued from the houses and silently fell into the ranks, as if by preconcerted arrangements.

In the immediate vicinity of Cæsar's palace, a body of seven hundred men—the condottieri of the Orsini family—were already stationed; and the two corps now combined in one serried column, Fabio Orsino at their head.

Then the entire force marched rapidly on to the palace of the Duke of Valentinois, who was aroused by his faithful Michelotto from slumbers in which he dreamt of power and glory, instead of peril and attack.

The Duke's sbirri were speedily under arms; and sallying forth to meet the assailants, themselves commenced the desperate conflict. Cæsar and Michelotto led them on:—on the other side, the Orsini fought with a valour stimulated by the remembrance of a thousand injuries to be now avenged on the Borgias.

The troops of the Duke were speedily routed, and driven into the palace. An entry was, however, forced; and the combat raged within those splendid saloons and marble halls which had been the scenes of so much pleasure and such deep guilt. Cæsar performed prodigies of valour: he challenged the chief of the Orsini family to single combat; but this demand was either unheard or disregarded in the vast court-yard at the back of the palace, into which the ducal sbirri were forced by the conquering assailants.

Then, overpowered by numbers, and seeing the bravest of his supporters lying dead around him, Cæsar was compelled to effect a rapid retreat, by the aid of Michelotto, with the remainder of his band. This movement was effected with great skill, and was materially aided by the ignorance of the back avenues of the palace under which the Orsini laboured.

Cæsar was thus enabled to retreat to the Vatican, within whose walls he found a temporary refuge.

The assailants then spread themselves over the ducal palace, and commenced the work of plunder and destruc-

tion. They penetrated into all the chambers—not even excepting the one where Cæsar was accustomed to take his baths of blood. In the laboratory, too, the glass jars and phials containing the poison of the Borgias were found; and these were despatched to the palace of Fabio Orsino, for the purposes of analyzation.

It was thus that the principal secrets of the Borgia family were discovered, and subsequently made public.

In the meantime Cæsar, accompanied by Michelotto, and supported by the remnants of the shattered sbirri—once so formidable—had obtained refuge, as before mentioned, in the Vatican.

Stationing his men in such a manner as to defend the gates of the Papal palace, the Duke of Valentinois hurried to the chamber where Pius III. lay upon the bed of death.

The old Pope, who had only worn the mitre crown of St. Peter twenty-four days, was indeed almost at the last gasp; and when Cæsar, covered with blood, rushed into his apartment, he raised himself with difficulty on the pillow, murmuring a prayer—for he thought that he was about to become the victim of assassination.

"Holy father," exclaimed Cæsar, advancing towards the bed, from which the physician—the only person in attendance on his Holiness—immediately withdrew to the opposite side of the chamber,—“holy father, the enemies of my family and of yours have attacked me in my dwelling, slain two-thirds of my choice troops, and compelled me to seek refuge here. In my capacity of General of the Roman Armies I implore the protection of your Holiness.”

"Alas! my son," returned the Pope, in a faint tone, "what can a dying man do for you in this strait?"

"Dying? impossible!" cried Cæsar, now finding leisure amidst the embarrassments of his thoughts and in the serious pressure of his adverse circumstances, to survey with attention the countenance of the venerable Pontiff; then, shocked by the terrible alteration which only a few days had wrought in the old man, the Duke exclaimed, "This is not natural, my liege! Treachery has been at work here. What ails your Holiness?"

"A slight sore on the arm," returned the Pope, "has spread into a large and cankerous ulcer. My physician has applied a plaster to it; but—Oh! it burns me—it burns me! It is like a devouring flame."

"Ah!" cried Cæsar, a light breaking in upon his mind; "the Orsini have done this!"

Then, unceremoniously turning down the bed-clothes, Cæsar lifted the arm of the invalid, who moaned with pain and anguish as the Duke touched it.

Without a moment's hesitation, Cæsar rushed upon the physician, dragged him towards the bed, and exclaimed, "On your knees!"

Alarmed by the thundering voice and the fierce manner of the Duke of Valentinois, the physician sank into the suppliant posture thus commanded; and, losing his presence of mind, the miserable wretch clasped his hands together, saying, "Spare me, my lord—spare me!"

Cæsar drew his blood-stained sword, and laid it on the bed; then, hastily taking from his bosom the talismanic medallion which his father Alexander had been accustomed to wear, he placed it near the plaster on the Pope's arm. An emerald which was set in the middle of the medallion instantly grew pale.

"Enough!" cried Cæsar, hastily thrusting the talisman into the breast of his doublet: "my worst fears are confirmed. Your Holiness is poisoned!"

"Poisoned!" murmured the Pope, a convulsive shudder passing over him; and he sank back almost insensible on his pillow.

"Mercy, mercy!" ejaculated the physician, wringing his hands in all the agony of his fearful situation: "mercy—and I will confess."

"Confess, then!" cried Cæsar. "Who bribed you to do this?"

"Fabio Orsino," replied the miserable physician; "but, oh! my lord, spare me—spare me—"

He did not utter another word.

Rapidly as lightning, Cæsar snatched up his sword, and, stepping back a pace or two, let it fall with tremendous force upon the head of the wretched being at his feet.

The physician fell forward, a corpse:—his head was split asunder; and the brains bespattered the bed of the dying Pope.

The sudden sound of that terrific blow, and the fall of a heavy body upon the floor, aroused Pius III., who once more contrived feebly to raise himself in his bed.

"Your Holiness is at least avenged on one of your

\* Alexander sold the Keys, the Altars, and Christ:—  
He had a right to sell what he had previously bought.

enemies!" said Cæsar, coolly, as he pointed to the corpse of the physician: "Fabio Orsino bribed that wretch to apply a poisoned plaster to the arm of his sovereign. But time presses, my liege—my own life is in danger: what course am I to pursue?"

"The key of the corridor leading to the Castle of Saint Angelo is beneath my pillow," returned the dying Pontiff; "take it—and save yourself. I give you my blessing!"

Cæsar did not wait to express his gratitude to the Pope; but, possessing himself of the key, hastened to secure his own safety by means of a rapid retreat to the Castle of Saint Angelo.

The governor of that fortress received him with courtesy, being well aware that Cæsar must have received the key from the hand of the Pope; and this fact was considered in the light of a command that the Duke was to be protected from his enemies. The governor accordingly sent, by Cæsar's desire, to inform Michelotto that he might retreat with his troops to the castle; and this intimation was gladly complied with; for the Orsini, having ransacked Cæsar's palace, were now advancing towards the Vatican, to complete their conquest.

But Cardinal Copis appeared on the threshold of the Papal palace, and, addressing himself to Fabio Orsino, assured him that the Pope was on his death-bed,—a fact already full well known to this chief, since he himself had bribed the physician to apply the poisoned plaster,—and that the Duke of Valentinois had found refuge in the castle.

Then, in spite of the remonstrances of Father Anselm, Fabio Orsino commanded a retreat; for he well knew that his force was not powerful enough to make any impression upon that fortress.

The day passed:—great was the excitement that prevailed throughout the city;—loud were the curses that were vented against the Borgias;—and enthusiastic was the applause that saluted the exploit of the Orsini.

Father Anselm, who had vowed destruction against the entire family of Borgia, instituted a strict search after Lucrezia;—but all his exertions were vain: she was nowhere to be found.

No:—for, so soon as the news of the attack upon her brother's palace reached her ears, she had determined to provide for her own safety; and, aided by Faust, succeeded in escaping from Rome.

The day passed, we said, in excitement; and the Roman people began to imagine that they were never more destined to know peace and tranquillity.

In the evening Pope Pius III. died; and several of the most influential cardinals, who hated the Orsini faction, sent to offer their countenance and support to Cæsar Borgia in his struggle with his enemies. These welcome tidings were received by him at midnight; and hope was again roused within his breast.

Overcome by fatigue, he threw himself on a couch in one of the governor's apartments; and his eyes were closing in slumber, when the door was opened cautiously.

An individual, muffled in a cowl, and holding a lamp in one hand while he protected it against the draught with the other, entered the room.

Cæsar started up, and seized the sword which lay by his side.

"Fear nothing, my lord," said the intruder: "I come as a suppliant, and not as an enemy."

Then, placing the lamp on the table, this mysterious visitor threw aside his cowl, and revealed the countenance of Cardinal Julian de la Rovere.

"What would your Eminence wish me?" demanded Cæsar, in a suspicious tone, and still retaining his drawn sword in his hand.

"Your lordship can command the majority of the Sacred College," said Julian; "and I claim your support. Raise me to the pontifical throne, and you shall yet crush your enemies."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Cæsar.

The conditions were then settled between these two individuals; and Julian de la Rovere withdrew.

Thus did the defeated and almost ruined Borgia find himself courted by a candidate for the mitre-crown of Christendom!

Nor was the result long dubious. The holy conclave assembled on the following morning in the Vatican:—it was deemed expedient, in consequence of the distracted state of Rome, to elect a sovereign without delay:—and Cæsar urged the cardinals on with unusual precipitation.

At eleven o'clock in the forenoon the ballot was completed, and Julian de la Rovere was chosen Pope.

Scarcely had Michelotto entered Cæsar's chamber in the Castle of Saint Angelo, to communicate these tidings, when the clatter of martial weapons in the court on which the casements of the room looked, alarmed the Duke and his dependant.

Hastening to the window, Cæsar exclaimed, "We are betrayed! The new Pope has deceived me—the governor has betrayed us! Michelotto, naught remains to us but to sell our lives as dearly as possible:—the Orsini are at hand!"

"The Orsini are here!" thundered the well-known voice of Fabio, as the door was dashed open, and that chief, accompanied by Father Anselm, Walstein, Fritz, and others of his supporters, burst into the room.

"Perdition!" exclaimed Cæsar: "we are lost!"

"Yes: your last hour is come, perfidious Borgia!" ejaculated Anselm, rushing upon the Duke with a long sharp dagger in his hand.

"Wretch!" cried Faust, springing forward from the crowd on the threshold at the same moment, and averting the furious blow, which the priest aimed at the Duke's heart: "the Borgias yet have friends!" and he hurled the disappointed priest to the farther side of the chamber.

"Thanks, noble Count of Aurana!" exclaimed Cæsar: "this is the second time thou hast saved my life!"

Fabio Orsino and his followers were so astounded by this sudden exploit,—performed, too, by one whose presence amongst them they had not previously noticed,—that they stood rivetted to the spot in speechless surprise and dismay.

"Back, cowards!" exclaimed Faust, advancing proudly towards the group, without even drawing his sword, but at the same time his eye wandered for a moment towards a large iron ring which was fixed to a strong staple in the wall at about breast-height:—"back, cowards, I say!" he continued. "Is it thus that ye would assassinate an enemy in cold blood? Back—back, I say! Look, Fabio Orsino, at yon writhing viper in a sacred habit," continued the Count, pointing with disdain towards Anselm, who was groaning with pain upon the floor. "Would you know who your coadjutor is? I will tell you! He is a wretch who has passed through the hands of the public executioner:—the ignominious halter has been round his neck: for twenty-six years have now elapsed since Ulric Kinis was hanged on the walls of Vienna:—and this man, whom ye call Father Anselm, is the resuscitated corpse of that self-same Ulric Kinis!"

## CHAPTER LXI.

### THE TRAP-DOOR IN THE CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO.

It is impossible to describe the astonishment which prevailed amongst the Orsini when Faust thus denounced him whom they had known as Father Anselm.

In that chivalrous age there was something revolting and abhorrent in the idea of having any connexion with a man who had been doomed to an infamous punishment of any kind.

Fabio Orsino shared that feeling, which can scarcely be denominated a prejudice, in common with others: and he now suddenly learnt to look upon Father Anselm—or rather Ulric Kinis—with aversion and disgust.

"Yes," continued Faust; "twenty-six years ago that man was condemned to death in Vienna; and he was executed in the presence of thousands. A gibbet was erected on the ramparts of the imperial capital; and Ulric Kinis was hanged thereto—hanged by the common executioner! The degrading halter was tied round his throat; and he was thrown from a ladder to swing in the air! A few minutes afterwards, when it was deemed that life was extinct, he was cut down; and the supposed corpse was sent to the surgeon of the criminal gaol for dissection. But Ulric was destined to escape that ignominious catastrophe. The surgeon ordered the bodies,—for there were others executed at the same time, and for the same deed,—to be placed in the dissecting-room ready for anatomisation at night. Kinis came to his senses, and escaped. When the surgeon entered shortly after sunset he found that the door of the room had been forced, and one of the bodies was gone. On further examination he perceived that a cloak which he had left in an adjoining chamber had disappeared, and a bureau was broken open, whence a sum of money had been abstracted. The truth flashed upon him: one of his subjects for the scalpel had revived! The surgeon was doubtless afraid of being deemed an accomplice in the affair; and he held his tongue. Let Ulric Kinis deny this if he can!"



The miserable wretch rose slowly from the floor, and drawing the cowl over his countenance, said, in a hollow tone, "Let me go—let me depart. I have no longer any business here!"

The Orsini made way for him—drawing themselves far back on either side, so that not even their garments might touch those of an individual who had passed through the hands of the public executioner.

As he passed Walstein, Kinis glanced at him significantly through the opening in his cowl; but even that vile impostor—that degraded being who had himself so narrowly escaped death by the halter or the wheel—averted his eyes.

Fritz was less fastidious.

"For my part," he said, "I don't know why a man who has passed through the hands of the executioner should be treated as if he had the plague; and if all the rest desert him, I will remain faithful."

With these words, Fritz followed in the steps of Ulric Kinis; and in a few moments those two individuals were out of sight.

"My lord," said Faust, addressing himself to Fabio Orsino, "let this exposure teach you to be more cautious whom you may in future choose as the instruments of your designs. As for the cowardly deed of assassination which you contemplated—"

"And by what right do you, a foreigner—a stranger, presume to dictate to the Orsini?" demanded Fabio, in a stern and indignant voice.

"By a right which it will not be worth your while to dispute," answered Faust, contemptuously, as he stood before Cæsar Borgia and Micheletto: "the right of power! Know you not that in this castle there are concealed trap-doors covering deep wells, and which may be made to open by merely touching a spring? Have you never heard of the skill with which Marco Orsino—an ancestor of your own, my lord—contrived those terrible means of annihilating an invading foe?"

"I have heard of such secret trap-doors and profound pits," answered Orsino, impatiently; "but I believe the tale to be one which has no other foundation than the brain of some romance-loving historian. Stand back, my lord Count—the last hour of the Borgias is at hand!"

"No—it is for you to stand back!" thundered Faust; "or a mine shall open beneath you! At this moment, proud noble, you and your brave followers are quivering as it were upon the brink of eternity! For there is a trap-door beneath your feet: and here," cried the Count, seizing hold of the iron ring which was fastened to the wall,—"here is the key of the secret spring that, at my will, will cause the floor to give way under you!"

An exclamation of horror burst from the lips of Orsino's followers; but Fabio himself seemed yet incredulous.

"Foolish—unbelieving noble!" ejaculated Faust; "re-treat while it is yet time. See—I will give thee a fair and befitting opportunity."

And, as he spoke, he withdrew his hand from the iron ring.

At that moment Micheletto rushed to the ring, and turned it forcibly in its socket, ere Faust could seize upon his arm.

The effect was instantaneous and terrible.

A large square in the floor instantly gave way, falling downwards like a trap-door; and Fabio Orsino, together with four or five of his supporters, were precipitated into a black and yawning gulf.

Fearful were the shrieks and yells which they uttered as they fell headlong into that profound pit.

In a moment there was a great splash of water at the bottom of the well; and those appalling outbursts of human agony were continued for some minutes. The miserable wretches were struggling in the depths which were destined to become their tomb.

By degrees the cries and screams became fainter and fainter, as one after the other sank to rise no more.

At length all was still.

On one side of the hideous gulf now stood the five or six remaining sbirri who had followed Fabio Orsino on the present fatal occasion; and on the other side were Faust, Cæsar, and Micheletto.

The Orsini warriors were still gazing into the abyss, with unutterable horror depicted upon their countenances;—Faust stood in gloomy silence, his looks also plunged into the gulf; while Cæsar and Micheletto exchanged glances expressive of triumph, and beaming with the ferocity of gratified revenge.

At length Faust spoke.

"Depart," said he, to the Orsini condottieri on the opposite side of the abyss: "ye have no longer any business here."

The men to whom these words were addressed did not hesitate to obey the order they conveyed.

"The past cannot be recalled," exclaimed Faust, turning towards Cæsar and Micheletto; "but I could have wished that this sad catastrophe had not occurred."

"They sought our lives like cowardly assassins, instead of in honourable fight," said Cæsar; "and Micheletto acted well. At the same time, noble Count, our heartfelt thanks are due unto thee, for the part which thou hast enacted in this day's peril. But tell me how thou camest so opportunely to our aid."

"Yesterday morning," replied the Count, "I conducted her Highness Lucreza in safety from Rome, and protected her during a considerable portion of her journey towards Ferrara. She implored me, when I left her, to assist you against your enemies. I promised to fulfil her desire to the utmost of my power; and I came back to Rome. For your sister's safety you need entertain no fear: she is by this time far beyond the reach of her enemies. Last evening on my return to the city, I heard that Father Anselm had been searching for her, and that he was resolved to have your life also. His history was known to me—no matter how. I knew that you had taken refuge in this fortress, and I resolved to protect you to the utmost of my power. When the election of Julian de la Rovere was declared, Fabio Orsino had an immediate but brief audience of the new Pontiff. You may divine what took place between them, since that interview was followed by the visit of Fabio, Anselm,—or rather Ulric Kinis,—and their sbirri, to this chamber. I bore them company, and was in time to save you, and tear the mask from the visage of the man whose dagger so nearly drank your life's blood."

"My eternal gratitude is your due," said Cæsar. "But by what fortunate circumstance had you learnt the existence of so terrible a means of destruction as that which yawns at our feet? for that was a secret unknown even to me."

"Pardon me if I cannot satisfy your curiosity," replied Faust. "My means of information are great: but they are also mysterious. Let it suffice that I have saved thy life. And now, if thou wilt follow my counsel, thou wilt do well—for Rome abounds in dangers which thou canst not long avoid."

"Speak," said Cæsar: "you are a friend too staunch, and an adviser too keen for me to neglect the counsel that you may proffer."

"Disguise yourself in the garb of a monk, and quit Rome," returned Faust. "Proceed to Ostia, and thence embark for Spezzio. The way will then be open for you to reach Ferrara in safety. You may yet consolidate your power as Prince of the Romagna territory; but you never again can hold the office of General of the Roman armies, nor control the election of a Pope. Depart—time is precious—Julian de la Rovere is your enemy—and the Orsini have a new injury to avenge."

As he spoke, he pointed towards the yawning gulf.

"And you, Count," exclaimed Cæsar, significantly,—

"do you propose to join my sister at Ferrara?"

"No," answered Faust, coldly: "to speak truth, I am weary of the cause of the Borgias. I will—because I can—protect your escape from Rome to Ostia; and there I shall quit you."

"You have soon become fatigued of the blandishments of Lucreza," observed Cæsar, biting his lips to suppress the emotions which Faust's cold indifference had provoked.

"I care not if I tell you," answered the Count, "that your sister Lucreza is so stained with past crimes and so ready to perpetrate new ones, that I—yes, even I—recoil in horror from such a fiend beneath the shape of an angel."

"My lord!—this to me?" ejaculated Cæsar, raising his sword in a menacing manner.

"You urged me to reveal the truth—and I have gratified you," said Faust, not even appearing to notice the threatening posture of the Duke: then deliberately advancing towards the ring, he turned it back into its former position, and the trap-door rose once more level with the floor of the apartment. "Come," he added, turning towards Borgia; "if thou wilt follow my counsel, there is no time to lose."

Cæsar swallowed his spite and suppressed his indignation for the first time in his life; but he felt overawed—and he scarcely knew why—in the presence of an individual whom he had more than once seen manifest the possession

of power, means, and resources of an extraordinary nature. The impunity with which Faust had drunk the poisoned wine which was handed to him by mistake at the banquet,—the facility with which he had cleared a passage amongst the crowds and even overawed them at Alexander's funeral,—the suddenness with which he had ere now appeared on the scene to avert the knife of Ulric Kinis from its deadly aim,—the intimacy which he exhibited, although a comparative stranger in Rome, in respect to the secrets of the Castle of Saint Angelo,—the coolness with which he contemplated, or rather defied danger,—and the confidence with which he spoke of being enabled to ensure Cæsar's safe retreat from Rome,—all these circumstances flashed to the memory of the Duke of Valentinois, and appeared, in their aggregate, to signify a power which being unaccountable, overawed even the bold, fearless, and desperate nature of a Borgia.

Cæsar accordingly thought fit to follow the advice of the Count of Anrana. Michelotto was despatched to fetch the necessary disguises; and in a short time he returned with three ecclesiastical habits.

Clad in these garments, Faust, Cæsar, and Michelotto issued without molestation from the Castle of Saint Angelo. Thence they proceeded to the Tiber, where they entered a boat, which, by the aid of a large sail and the tide, soon conveyed them to Ostia.

On landing at that seaport, Faust placed a heavy bag of gold in Cæsar's hands, saying, "You are now safe from the pursuit of your enemies. Farewell—it is probable that we may never see each other again."

"Farewell, noble Count," exclaimed the Duke of Valentinois. "But one word ere we part:—wherefore have you manifested so much interest in my cause?"

"Partially for the sake of your beautiful sister Lucreza," answered Faust; "and partially because I have a kindred feeling in favour of a bold, ambitious, and desperate man like you."

And with these words, Faust hurried away.

"That is a strange and mysterious being," said Cæsar, contemplating the Count's receding form with admiration. "He seems to possess some power—some influence which I cannot comprehend. It is well known that he raised himself suddenly and in a moment from the depths of obscurity to the pinnacle of wealth, rank, and prosperity; and no one can tell precisely how."

"Perchance he hath dealings with the Evil One," said Michelotto.

"Nay," returned the Duke, laughing: "if Satan made compacts with mortals, as romancists state and as nursery tales recite, he would long ago have sought to enlist the Borgias in his service."

"Perhaps he considers the Borgias do his work so well of their own accord, that there is no need of inducements on his part," observed Michelotto, carelessly.

But scarcely were the words uttered, when Cæsar and the sbirro started with some degree of trepidation; for it seemed to them as if a low, mocking, fiend-like laugh rang in their ears.

"It was fancy," said Cæsar, recovering his presence of mind.

"Yes—it was the imagination," added Michelotto. "Still, it is said that many a true word is spoken in jest; and when I ere now let fall that lightsome observation, I may have uttered a grand fact."

The Duke made no reply, but hastened towards the harbour for the purpose of hiring a vessel to take him and his dependant to Spezzio.

## CHAPTER LXII.

### THE INN AT KEMBERG.

It was now the month of August, 1497; and the golden harvests around the city of Wittenberg filled the hearts of the tillers of the soil with hope and rejoicing.

We must request the readers to accompany us to the little village of Kemberg, to which we introduced them at the opening of our tale.

Mine host of the Black Swan was sitting upon the bench beneath the antique portico of his hostel regaling himself with a flagon of home-brewed beer, the nut-brown hue of which was as clear as that of the finest juice of the grape.

Messer Herman had risen to be a man of some authority in the village. He exercised the functions of local magistrate; and this circumstance, added to the existence of a vague rumour that he was in some degree connected with the Secret Tribunal, invested him with an air of importance which, by his manner and speech, he took good care to maintain.

The evening was gradually becoming more obscure; and already was the broad disc of the sun concealed beneath the western hills, when a horseman, coming from a south-eastern direction, rode up to the Black Swan.

Mine host did not condescend to move from his seat: he observed that the traveller was unattended, and that his garb was plain, though neat and of good materials; but Messer Herman could not think, as a magistrate, of exhibiting any particular civility towards a person who had no lacquey, and whose baggage consisted of a small valise strapped to the back part of the saddle.

The landlord accordingly contented himself with exclaiming, "What, ho! Ludwig, you lazy loon! Here's a traveller at the door!"—and he then refreshed himself with another stoup of the generous home-brewed.

Ludwig made his appearance in the shape of a deformed ostler, with a shaggy head of hair so entangled and so filled with bits of straw that at first sight it seemed an artificial tegument instead of a natural covering.

Dragging himself slowly along, he approached the horseman, whom he assisted to dismount.

"Can I be accommodated with entertainment and lodging for the night?" inquired the traveller.

"Ah! marry, can you—for money," answered Ludwig.

"I require nothing on any other terms," said the young man—for such he was. "But here is worthy Messer Herman, looking as well as ever; and surely I cannot be so altered that he fails to recollect me."

"By the best bin in my cellar, this must be excellent Messer Pianalla!" exclaimed the host, who had at first prepared himself to prove the familiarity of his guest in venturing a remark upon the magisterial health.

"Yes—it is Otto Pianalla who now addresses you," said our young friend, laughing. "But you will oblige me by ordering your folks to bustle a little in preparing my supper; for I am both hungry and thirsty."

"Ludwig, tell the cook to brand a chicken and serve it with a nice rasher," exclaimed Herman, forgetting his magisterial dignity in the real pleasure which he experienced in seeing one whom he had known from childhood, and whose amiable qualities had been proverbial in the whole neighbourhood. "Your supper, good youth, shall be ready soon;—so much for your hunger. As for your thirst, assuage it now with a stoup of this home-brewed."

Pianalla accepted the landlord's courteous offer, and seated himself on the bench to chat for half an hour until his supper was prepared.

"I shall be compelled to have your meal served in the public room, Messer Otto," said mine host, after a brief pause; "for the only parlour of which the Black Swan can boast is occupied by two strangers—not strangers either, altogether—but of that no matter."

"Spare your apologies, worthy Herman," said Otto; "I am no courtly gallant who seeks luxury. A hard crust on a plain board is sufficient for me."

"What news of your sister Ida?" inquired the host. "I heard of her union with a powerful noble—"

"Speak not of her," said Pianalla, mournfully. "She no longer breathes the air of this world."

"So young—and to be no more!" exclaimed the landlord.

"She died by violence," observed the artist, hastily. "But, pr'ythee, let us change the discourse."

"We will so; and you shall tell me what brings you again into these parts. Methought that you would make a fortune in Vienna."

"I struggled long with poverty and neglect," replied Otto; "but it was my good destiny to be instrumental in rendering a great service to a nobleman of honourable mind and generous disposition; and, by his aid, I am placed in more prosperous circumstances. As to the business that brings me into these parts, it is no secret. The Lady of Anrana has not seen her father, the Baron of Rosenthal, for four years; and she has charged me with letters to his lordship. I gladly undertook the mission, inasmuch as I felt an anxiety to visit a neighbourhood dear to my childhood; and, moreover," added the young artist, "I am now possessed of means to enable me to place a stone upon my mother's grave."

"You were always a good son," said Messer Herman; "and you do not forget your parent because she is no more."

At this moment a buxom lass, the landlord's niece, came to inform Otto that his supper was ready; and as he rose to enter the hostel, the girl hastily whispered to her uncle, "Those two persons in the parlour desire your presence immediately."

While the artist was discussing the viands that he found spread upon the table in the public room, the landlord repaired to the parlour, which was situate on the first floor, and the windows of which commanded a front view.

As he placed his left hand upon the latch of the door, Herman removed his cap with the right; and his magisterial dignity sank into something very closely resembling servile submissiveness.

On entering the room, he closed the door carefully behind him, and bowed low to Father Anselm (for so we had better continue to call him, as he himself still retained that name), who was seated in company with Fritz at a table whereon stood a flask of wine and capacious drinking-cups.

"Sit down, Herman," said Father Anselm. "You ere now received a new guest. I recognised him from the window."

"Does your reverence know him?" exclaimed the landlord, with some manifestation of alarm,—for he was by no means at a loss to perceive that there was nothing cordial in Anselm's manner when speaking of the new arrival.

"Yes—I know him well. He is Otto Pianalla; and his name is on the black page of the registry of the Vehm. Two months ago at Vienna he received a summons by means of the Cord and Dagger," continued Anselm in a low but stern tone: "and he did not obey it. He has been judged and condemned by default. Chance has sent him this evening to the place where he must meet his fate. You will lodge him in the Wainscot Chamber to-night."

The countenance of the landlord fell. He dared not remonstrate against the command of a Free Count of the Secret Tribunal: his oath of membership bound him to sacrifice "all considerations, of kindred, relationship, friendship, amity, interest, and love, to the service of the Holy Vehm;"—and he was also well aware that any attempt on his part to save a young man whom he really liked would be visited on his own head by the signal vengeance of the Bloody League.

He therefore assumed an air of composure as quickly as he could, and bowed an acquiescence in the commands of the chief.

"You may retire," said Father Anselm; "and see that you are cautious in your discourse with Otto Pianalla. Let not a word fall from you that may induce him to suspect our presence in your house. In an hour we shall be prepared for supper, which you will bring to us with your own hands."

Herman bowed once more, and left the room with a heavy heart.

The unhappy man hastened to his own chamber, and throwing himself upon the bed, reflected on the order which he had just received.

"I have known Otto from childhood," he thought within himself; "and it is cruel that he should find his death beneath my roof. I cannot do it—and yet I dare not save him! My own life would be the sacrifice! Holy Virgin protect us both! What can I do? If I warn him of his peril, and put him on his guard, I shall be suspected all the same. Woe be to the day when I first joined the Bloody League! It respects no Christian duties—has no sympathy with any ties of the heart, however sacred! Alas! what can I do? To save him would be to ruin myself! He must die, then—he must die! and it is my hand that will guide him to destruction."

An hour passed while the landlord lay reasoning with himself; and his reflections ended, as the reader may suppose, in a reluctant determination to do his duty towards the Holy Vehm!

He descended to the kitchen, and thence carried up the supper prepared for Father Anselm and Fritz. Having performed this duty with an affected composure which but indifferently concealed the acute anguish of his heart, he returned to the kitchen, and said to his niece, "You will conduct Messer Pianalla to the Wainscot Chamber, when it shall suit him to retire. I am about to withdraw to my own room—for I feel somewhat indisposed. Good night."

And the landlord hastened to his bed-chamber.

The girl had only resided with her uncle for a few weeks, and was unaware of the dread import of the command which she had received. She knew that the Wainscot Chamber was not often appropriated to the use of the guests who stopped at the hotel; but the circumstance had not awakened in her mind the remotest suspicion of the dread influence which governed the destinies of those few to whom the apartment was ever allotted. She there-

fore looked upon the order which she had received in the light of a mere domestic arrangement on the part of her uncle, and did not devote a second thought to the matter.

It was now ten o'clock; and Pianalla was thinking of the propriety of retiring for the night, when it struck him that he would pay a visit to the stable and assure himself that his steed was well cared for, as he entertained but a limited notion of the honesty of the hump-backed ostler.

Scarcely had he left the room, when a man, enveloped in a cloak, and exhibiting a sadly travel-soiled appearance, entered the hostel, the front door of which was still standing open.

The landlord's niece instantly made her appearance to learn his pleasure.

"My good lass," said the traveller, in a hurried tone, and casting an anxious glance around, "I have certain enemies near at hand, and you must conceal me. Here—take this piece of gold,—it will buy thee a trinket for thy Sunday attire;—and hasten to conduct me to a chamber."

"Enemies, sir!" exclaimed the girl. "Have you been attacked on the highway?"

"Yes—yes," replied the man, more impatiently still. "But tarry not to ask me questions;—lead me to a chamber, and give me a flagon of wine, for I am cruelly athirst."

"There is not a vacant room in the house, sir," said the girl. "The only bed-chamber to spare is to be allotted to a traveller who has stepped round to the stables: but I can make you a comfortable couch on the chairs in the public room—"

"No—no," interrupted the man; "I must have a chamber to myself. Give me the one allotted to the traveller whom you mentioned; and doubtless—to oblige so pretty a girl as yourself—he will consent to any other arrangement you may propose."

"But my uncle, sir—"

"No more words," cried the stranger, sternly: "show me to the spare room; and another piece of gold shall be yours in the morning."

This inducement was sufficient to dispel all farther hesitation on the part of the landlord's niece: and, taking a lamp in her hand, she led the way to the Wainscot Chamber.

For she reasoned thus within herself:—

"It cannot matter to my uncle who occupies the Wainscot Chamber, provided he be well paid for the accommodation he affords. This traveller seems liberal even to profusion; and two pieces of gold are to be earned in a few hours—whereas I should not gain so much in a year under other circumstances. As for Messer Pianalla, he appears so gentle—so kind—and so good a young man, that he will not object to any arrangement which I may make for his night's rest. Moreover, I have not told him as yet any particular chamber was intended for him;—and thus it will be easy to make all smooth and comfortable."

She accordingly conducted the new-comer to the Wainscot Chamber.

"A flagon of wine and some hot water," said the man, as he received the lamp from her hand.

These demands were speedily complied with; and the guest bolted the door of the apartment immediately after the girl had left it.

When she descended once more to the public room, Otto Pianalla had returned from the stables.

"It is fortunate that I visited my horse," he observed to the landlord's niece; "for that groom of yours had sadly neglected the poor animal. I have, however, done the duty which Ludwig, as methinks you call him, should have performed. And now, maiden, I will thank thee to conduct me to my chamber."

The girl commenced a variety of excuses for the indifferent accommodation which she was compelled to offer the guest: but Otto cut her short by observing, "I have already assured Messer Herman that I am no courtly gallant who can only sleep on down. Tell me where I may lay my head—and that will suffice."

The girl was overjoyed at this complaisance on the part of Otto Pianalla; and she bustled actively about to spread him a comfortable bed in the public room.

The artist was well contented with the arrangement:—the landlord's niece retired to her own apartment;—and in a few minutes profound silence reigned throughout the inn.

## CHAPTER LXIII.

## A NIGHT OF STRANGE ADVENTURES.

THE moment the traveller, who had shown so much pertinacity in obtaining a private apartment, was installed in the Wainscot Chamber of the Black Swan tavern, and the door had closed behind the landlord's niece, he threw aside his cloak, and drank a deep draught from the flagon of wine which he had ordered.

Then, by means of the hot water, he proceeded to cleanse his garments, which were stained with blood—those tale-telling marks being still damp, as if only recently imprinted.

"It was strange," muttered the man to himself, as he was thus employed: "the voice of the traveller seemed familiar to me; but the road was so dark with the shade of the huge overhanging trees, where I attacked him, that I could not obtain a glimpse of his features. And how he struggled!—how desperately he fought! 'Vil-lain, unhand me!' was all he said; but the tone was not strange to me. And yet it may be mere fancy on my part! Curses on these stains: how obstinate they are! Old women's tales declare that human blood, when spilled by the murderer's hand, cannot be effaced; and of a surety the assertion seems verified now. Idiot that I am to allow myself thus to be overawed by a superstitious prejudice. Yes—for one has disappeared: it is the mark of the water that I now perceive. And there—another is effaced! Suspicion will not attach itself to me. Nevertheless I must be off early in the morning, ere the body be discovered. Unfortunate wretch that I am in all my undertakings! Although I want gold badly enough, Heaven knows!—I required a horse still more; and per-adventure I should not have attacked the traveller for his purse, had he been on foot. No—for in the dark it was impossible to see whether he were in a condition that denoted the possession of a purse worth taking! But it was his horse I coveted—his horse that was the inducement for me to attack him. Then, just at the very moment when, by a lucky and desperate blow, I overpowered him, the horse takes fright and scampers away—Heaven can only tell where! Maledictions on such ill-fortune!"

The man applied himself to the wine-flagon once more, and, after imbibing a second deep draught, continued the cleansing of his garments, and also the soliloquy:—

"And yet I need scarcely complain! If I lost the noble steed that would have saved me many a weary steep on foot, along these vile roads, I gained a well-filled purse and a good cloak. Would it not excite suspicion here, I might purchase a horse in this village. But no: that would be imprudent. A man who seeks an inn at a late hour and insists on having a private room—and who, perhaps, showed some embarrassment of manner in the presence of that girl—would come badly off, were he to sport his gold too freely, just at the time when a murdered traveller is perhaps found at scarcely two leagues' distance. No—I must be up at daybreak, and move on. France is now the country for me! If I can only contrive to reach Paris with a well-filled purse, I will play the German nobleman in a manner so perfect that every heiress will be ready to throw herself into my arms. I can then also send off some trustworthy persons to Vienna, to bargain with Faust for the surrender of certain papers which I have about me! Ah! it was a good thought of mine, to steal them from Ida's room one day! Oh! how I long to see the gay French capital. Germany is dangerous; its atmosphere is laden with peril for me. Italy I detest. Plenty to do and little recompense seemed the fate of all those who served the Orsini. Oh! the Borgias were the family to pay liberally. Would that I never joined the ranks of Caesar's enemies. And yet the Duke himself is, by all accounts, a wanderer and an exile: so, perhaps, I might still have found myself but one remove above a beggar—as I lately have been. And now all the stains have disappeared. Good! I will snatch a few hours' sleep; and at daybreak—off!"

The man emptied the wine-flask, and retired to rest, having previously extinguished the lamp.

In a few moments he was buried in a profound slumber.

An hour passed:—it was now midnight.

Suddenly one of the panels in a recess at that end of the room which faced the bed, was cautiously opened; and Father Anselm, enveloped in his cowl and hood, thrust his body half through the aperture.

He listened attentively; and the deep respiration of the occupant of the chamber met his ears.

"He sleeps," said Father Anselm, in a low whisper, to Fritz, who stood close behind him in the corridor which

led from their room to the secret means of communication with the Wainscot Chamber.

Fritz held a lamp, which he shaded with his hand.

"Will you have the light?" he asked, also in a tone scarcely audible.

"No," replied Anselm. "A man in a narrow bed is a good mark for even the most clumsy hand that ever wielded dagger. Remain thou here: in a minute all will be over."

The bloody-minded chief of the Holy Vehm then passed his body completely through the aperture,—regulating his movements, however, with the greatest caution, so as not to disturb the sleeper; and in a few moments he stood in the Wainscot Chamber—that fatal room where many a traveller had received the dread summons of the Cord and Dagger, and where also many a life had been sacrificed to the sanguinary decrees of the Secret Tribunal!

Drawing his long dagger from its sheath beneath his ecclesiastical garment, the Free Count approached the bed.

The moonbeams struggled faintly through the dingy casement, and enabled Fritz from the aperture in the recess to watch the tall dark form that, like the demon of vengeance, was advancing towards the couch where the unsuspecting sleeper lay.

But those beams reached not the bed itself; else would the assassin have perceived that the countenance of its occupant was not that of Otto Pianalla.

Father Anselm passed his hand gently over the bed-clothes, to gain an accurate idea of the precise position of his victim; then, grasping the dagger firmly in his right hand, he dealt a fearful blow at the sleeper's heart.

The couch shook with the sudden spasm that convulsed the frame of the murdered man;—and the next moment all was still—all was over!

But scarcely had Father Anselm regained the corridor and closed the panel, when a violent knocking at the front door of the inn raised every echo through the establishment.

The landlord, who had not closed his eyes since he retired to his chamber,—so profoundly was he afflicted at the fate which he supposed to be in reserve for Otto Pianalla, even if it had not already overtaken him,—thrust his head from the window, and demanded the meaning of that midnight summons.

"My master has been waylaid and cruelly treated," replied a man on horseback, with the form of a human being, apparently senseless, lying in front of him across the animal; and the individual who spoke was evidently a foreigner, for his German was marked with a strong Italian accent.

"In this case ye shall not tarry long at my gate," said Herman; and in a few moments he slipped on a portion of his clothing, and descended with a lamp in his hand.

He immediately assisted the horseman to alight; and the two together conveyed the senseless individual into the tavern. Ludwig was hastily summoned to take charge of the new-comer's steed; and Herman threw open the door of the public room, saying, "This way, good friend. We will examine your master's ailments; and, if need be, the village leech shall be summoned without delay."

They entered the room, bearing between them the senseless form which they placed in a large arm-chair. Then Herman hastened to fetch the lamp which he had left in the passage. When he reappeared, his eyes fell upon the couch which had been arranged on the chairs by his niece; and to his farther surprise, he beheld a person sitting up in the temporary bed, and surveying with mingled suspicion and alarm the scene that had disturbed him.

"Who are you, worthy friend?" exclaimed the host, approaching the couch; "and how came you hither?"

"You saw me arrive this evening, good Messer Herman," replied Otto Pianalla: "but it is rather for me to ask—"

"Merciful heaven!" ejaculated the landlord, so overcome by astonishment that he nearly let the lamp fall from his hands. "How happens it that you—"

"Pr'ythee cease that useless discourse, and come to the aid of my master," exclaimed the newly-arrived traveller. "He breathes—he opens his eyes—he recovers!" added the man, in a joyful tone. "Hasten, good landlord—bring wine!"

"Where am I?" murmured the wounded individual, from whose forehead the blood was oozing.

"In safety, my lord," was the answer given by the dependant. "Now, landlord—why dost thou remain staring so stupidly upon yon guest whom our coming has disturbed from his slumbers? Bring wine, I say."

Herman's ears had caught the words "my lord," in spite of the wildness of his surprise at finding Otto Pianalla in that apartment; and in his heart he was rejoiced to think that his young guest had escaped the vengeance of Father Anselm. Thus, the hope of having received into his establishment a good customer, in the person of one whose noble rank was revealed to him by the above-mentioned phrase, and the relief which his mind experienced in respect to Pianalla, triumphed temporarily over his dread of being deemed a traitor by the agents of the Vehm, and induced him to bustle about to procure all that was necessary to restore the wounded man.

Otto Pianalla, on his side, had in the meantime risen from his couch; and, hastily throwing on a portion of his garments, he approached to offer his services in undressing the nobleman and placing him on the couch which he had just left.

The dependant gladly accepted the aid so generously volunteered; and by the time the landlord returned with wine, vinegar, water, and bandages, the wounded nobleman was placed in a more comfortable position than in the arm-chair, and was partially divested of his attire.

"Where am I, Michelotto?" he murmured again.

"Your Highness is in safety," was the answer. "But pray compose yourself. A draught of this wine will revive your lordship: its flavour is none of the worst."

"The best in my cellar is at the disposal of his Highness," said Herman, whose quick ear had not failed to catch this still loftier title which was addressed to the wounded man.

Cæsar Borgia—for it was he—placed his lips to the cup which Michelotto presented him, and sipped a small portion of its contents. The colour came faintly back to his pale cheeks, and a scintillation of its wonted fires sparkled in his eye.

"Your Highness feels better?" said Michelotto, almost tenderly—for the attachment of the sbirro to his master was unbounded.

"Yes—I am better," returned Cæsar, in a feeble tone. "But my head—my head!"

And he fell back on the couch, overpowered by a sudden access of acute pain.

Otto Pianalla approached with a vessel containing fresh water, and bathed the temples of the wounded prince. When the clotted blood was washed away, a wide and gaping wound was discovered on the forehead.

"It is severe—but not mortal," said Michelotto, who had seen too much of wounds, cuts, and other hurts with which warfaring persons are familiar, not to have gathered some experience in such matters.

"I will bandage it carefully," observed Otto; and he proceeded to execute his humane task with as much rapidity and delicacy as possible.

Seeing that the work of restoration was going on so well, the landlord lighted another lamp, and slipped from the room for a few minutes; for he was profoundly anxious to solve a mystery which filled him with doubts, misgivings, and alarms.

Stealing to his niece's chamber, he knocked gently at the door. The girl, who had been aroused by the new arrivals at the inn, was up and dressing herself, under the impression that her services might be required below.

"I was on the point of coming down-stairs, uncle," said the maiden, partially opening the door, and thrusting forth her head. "Do the strangers require supper?"

"Hush! ask no questions, but answer mine," returned the landlord. "Wherefore didst thou make a bed for Messer Pianalla in the public room?"

And, as he spoke, Herman cast a scrutinizing glance upon the girl's countenance, on which the light of his lamp fell.

"To tell you the truth, dear uncle," was the immediate reply, "another traveller came after you had retired to your chamber—"

"Another traveller!" repeated the landlord, in alarm, for a fearful suspicion suddenly entered his mind.

"Yes," continued the girl, not noticing the peculiarity of her relative's manner; "and he insisted so earnestly upon having a private sleeping-apartment—"

"Merciful heavens!" interrupted the host; "and you placed him in the Wainscot Chamber?"

"I did, dear uncle; but pray be not offended. I thought there could be no harm—"

"Perdition!" cried Herman; "why did you not execute my commands? You know not—"

"Neither need she know anything," murmured a voice in the landlord's ear; and at the same time Herman felt a heavy hand laid upon his shoulder.

He turned, and beheld Father Anselm.

"You need not leave your room—you are not wanted—retire to bed again," stammered the landlord to his niece; and he himself hastily closed the door.

He then mechanically followed Father Anselm to the room occupied by him and Fritz.

"I overheard all that passed between you and your niece," said Anselm, "and can therefore acquit you of all blame in this affair. It is, however, clear that an awful mistake has been made, and—"

"Is the deed done?" demanded Herman, in a low and hoarse tone.

"A deed is done," answered Anselm, "and cannot be recalled. But the intended victim has escaped."

"Just heaven! an innocent man has been murdered!" exclaimed the landlord. "What a lamentable misadventure! Oh! what a fearful thing!"

"Hush this moaning for a matter that cannot be amended!" cried Anselm, impatiently. "Do you know who your new guests are? I heard the man on horseback speak to you on his arrival; and his voice strangely resembles one that is familiar to me. Nevertheless—"

"That man is only a servant, or dependant," answered the landlord; "and his master, who is cruelly wounded—I know not how—is a lord, a highness—"

"Ah! then my suspicions are well founded!" ejaculated Anselm. "And yet how strange! What business can they have in this neighbourhood?" he added, in a musing tone.

"The nobleman called his servitor by the name of Michelotto," observed the host, recalling this circumstance to mind when he perceived that Anselm was interested in the new-comers.

"Then there can be no doubt as to the other one!" cried the chief of the Vehm. "Oh! these are joyous tidings," he continued, a smile relaxing his harsh and forbidding countenance. "Vengeance is now within my reach—vengeance on him who exposed me—who heaped ashes upon my head—who covered me with shame in the presence of one of the haughtiest nobles of Rome!"

"Who is this Prince that has so mortally offended your reverence?" inquired the landlord.

"The Duke of Valentinois—Cæsar Borgia!" returned Father Anselm. "But I shall know full well how to avenge myself upon him!"

Thus saying, he cast a significant look upon Fritz, who was standing near, and who listened in mute surprise to the conversation which revealed to him the awful mistake that had been committed in respect to the occupant of the Wainscot Chamber, and also the presence of Cæsar Borgia with his favourite sbirro at the inn.

"Yes," observed Fritz: "the Cord and Dagger are as terrible to princes as peasants."

"Let us now pay a visit to the Wainscot Chamber, and ascertain if the traveller who ere now met his fate there by the error of your niece possesses any papers which may inform us of his name and station," said Father Anselm. "But one word, mine host, while the subject is fresh in my memory; as you value your life, let not Cæsar Borgia nor his dependant suspect that either myself or our faithful Fritz are lodgers in the Black Swan."

The landlord signified with a bow his obedience to his command.

## CHAPTER LXIV.

### THE SECRETS OF THE WAINSCOT CHAMBER.

FATHER ANSELM took the lamp and led the way to the Wainscot Chamber, Fritz following with his accustomed rude indifference of manner, and the landlord with a beating heart and a haggard countenance.

They advanced towards the bed, the sheets of which were saturated with blood.

But the moment the glare of the lamp fell upon the pale and distorted countenance of the corpse, an exclamation of surprise burst simultaneously from the lips of Father Anselm and Fritz.

"Is it possible? Gregory Walstein!" cried the Free Count of the Holy Vehm. "Yes—he who deserted me in the time of my need—in the hour of my disgrace—has received his death from my hand! Good Herman," added he, turning towards the landlord, "there is not so much to deplore as thou thinkest in this error. That man was a dangerous member of the League, and it is as well that his idle, tattling tongue and drunken buffooneries should be thus put an end to for ever. But let us examine his garments."

The clothes of the murdered man were speedily rifled. First there appeared a handsome and well-filled purse,



embroidered with armorial bearings, beneath which were the cyphers, "C. B."

"Ah!" exclaimed Father Anselm, "the heraldic blazonry and the initials of Caesar Borgia! Doubtless we have now a clue to the cause of that pitiable plight in which the Duke was brought to the inn. This man, Gregory Walstein, attacked and plundered him."

"Behold another proof thereof," said Fritz, who had been examining the handsome cloak that hung over the back of a chair. "This is the violet hue, and here is the curious embroidery on the collar that the Duke always displayed."

"Here, too, are the traces of newly-washed blood-stains upon Walstein's hose and doublet," added Father Anselm. "In all respects, you perceive, Messer Hermann, that this man deserved his fate. You can learn from Michelotto, anon, the particulars of the waylaying of Caesar Borgia; and we shall doubtless find the details corresponding with the proofs now established. But here are some papers:—it will be as well to examine them also."

As he thus spoke, Father Anselm drew from the pocket of the doublet a small portfolio containing a few documents.

"They are chiefly letters that have passed between the Count of Auran and Ida, the deceased wife of Gregory Walstein. Ah! then report spoke true! Yes—here are the proofs! Ida was the mistress of Faust, and Walstein received a lordly fortune as an inducement to espouse her. But here is a document of greater importance still! And now," added Father Anselm, triumphantly, as he glanced his eye over the paper,—"and now even the proud Count of Auran is in my power! Yes—he who exposed me in the presence of the Orsini is at my mercy!"

Then, in a measured tone, he read the contents of the document aloud:—

"I acknowledge myself to be the father of the babe which Ida Pianalla bears in her bosom. I bequeath to her the sum of one thousand crowns, as a means of subsistence, and to enable her to rear the offspring of my crime and her weakness in a manner befitting its future interests. And I charge those who may survive me, and who succeed to my wealth, to see this bequest of mine fulfilled. *Wilhelm Faust, COUNT OF AURANA.*"

"Every circumstance seems to favour my vengeance against those enemies who for a period triumphed over me," added Father Anselm. "And, oh! here is a letter from that proud Count to his mistress Ida, which proves—yes, proves beyond all doubt—how the offspring of their illicit love was disposed of! Doubtless, Walstein must have possessed himself of these documents ere the explosion of his imposture at Vienna. But of that no matter—they are mine now—and, ere long, they will serve my purposes!"

With these words, Father Anselm scoured the papers beneath his clothes.

"There is nothing more about these garments worthy of our attention," continued he, after a farther search. "Let all traces of this deed disappear in the usual manner."

The landlord seemed to obey this command with alacrity. He threw all the clothes of the deceased upon the bed, not even excepting Caesar Borgia's cloak; then taking a large key from a bunch that hung at his girdle, he applied it to a lock fixed in one of the bed-posts.

The key turned with a hoarse, grating noise, and an unseen bolt shot backwards with a sharp ringing sound. The entire woodwork, which formed what may be called the platform of the bed, turned rapidly round on an axis, while at the same moment, and in obedience to the same skilfully-contrived machinery, a large trap-door opened downwards immediately beneath, so that corpse, mattress, sheets, blankets, and the deceased's garments were precipitated into a yawning gulf under that fatal couch. There was a splash of water; and then all was still.

The landlord turned the key back again; the platform of the bed revolved once more on its axis, and fell into its proper horizontal position—and the trapdoor closed.

Another key now opened a large closet communicating with the room; and thence the landlord, aided by Fritz, conveyed another mattress and fresh sheets and blankets to the couch. These were arranged in such a manner as to convey the appearance of having been slept in. Thus all traces of the assassination had disappeared; and the landlord now felt relieved from a most oppressive load—for he knew that it would be easy to satisfy his niece in the morning relative to the disappearance of the traveller, by the simple excuse that he had taken his departure at a very early hour.

We may here observe that the contrivance of the fatal couch was by no means singular in respect to the Black Swan. Germany at that time abounded in taverns whose landlords were devoted to the service of the Bloody League, and where particular chambers were provided with secret avenues of communication, and with beds fashioned so as to afford a facility of effacing all signs of the dark vengeance of that tremendous tribunal.

When the work of concealment was thus completed, Father Anselm and Fritz returned to their chamber.

The landlord repaired to the public room, where he found the Duke of Valentinois wrapped in a profound slumber, and Michelotto relating to Otto Pianalla all he knew of the particulars of the murderous attack upon his master.

"My lord was riding some distance in front of me," said the sbirro, "when my horse suddenly cast a shoe, stumbled, and fell. I instantly dismounted, and encouraged the poor animal in the usual manner. Then I lost some few minutes farther in searching for the shoe, not knowing whether there might be a smith in this village, where we purposed to stop for the night. When I continued my way again, I came to a point where two roads branched off; and not perceiving my lord, I was uncertain which to take, being perfectly ignorant of this part of the country, and not having overheard the information given to my master relative to the proper road, at the inn where we had halted to dine. I accordingly took one of the paths at random, and pursued it for nearly an hour, without overtaking his Highness. At length I perceived a light, and advancing towards it, reached a cottage. There I inquired whether I was in the right road for Kemberg, where I knew we were to pass the night. I then learnt, to my annoyance, that I was pursuing the wrong road. I accordingly had no alternative, save to retrace my way, and take the other path at the point whence I had diverged. But scarcely had I proceeded twenty paces along the right road, leading to Kemberg, when I was alarmed by a low moan. I reined in my horse and listened. The sound was repeated, and I hastened to the spot whence it seemed to come. There, to my dismay, I found his Highness stretched almost lifeless in the road. His horse and cloak were gone, and I ere now perceived that his purse had also disappeared. There can be no doubt that he was attacked by robbers, who had left him in that miserable condition. Fortunately our valise, containing the larger portion of my master's gold for his travelling expenses, and other valuables, were strapped to my saddle; or the villains would have obtained the booty, the loss of which might have caused much embarrassment to us. I need scarcely add that, without loss of time, I lifted his Highness upon my horse, and brought him hither."

The landlord was an attentive listener to this narrative; and, when it was concluded, he muttered to himself, "There can be no doubt the villain that attacked his Highness was the same whose corpse is now at the bottom of the covered well."

In the meantime, Father Anselm and Fritz were engaged in earnest deliberation, in their own apartment.

"Caesar Borgia cannot have fled from Italy empty-handed," said the Free Count, "and the most agreeable part of my vengeance will be to compel him to reveal the place where he has deposited his treasures, or the person to whom he has entrusted them. We must confine him in Linsdorf Castle, and hold out hopes of liberation on the payment of a princely ransom."

"By virtue of the rescript which your reverence possesses," said Fritz, "it will be easy to make Count Manfred, of Linsdorf, your instrument in this respect."

"Well spoken, good Fritz," exclaimed Anselm. "Ere the first glimmer of the dawn I will set out for Linsdorf Castle. It will be thy duty to watch Otto Pianalla, who doubtless will not tarry long at the Black Swan; and the Cord and Dagger must rid us of that dangerous enemy."

"Trust to my good steel," said Fritz. "Where shall I rejoin your reverence?"

"At Linsdorf Castle," was the answer.

In this manner did the two members of the Vehm converse until within an hour of daylight.

Father Anselm then took his departure for Linsdorf Castle, and Fritz remained behind at the inn to watch the motions of Otto Pianalla.

As had been anticipated, the young artist was not disposed to prolong his sojourn at the inn; for no sooner did the first gleam of dawn appear in the east, when Ludwig brought his good steed round to the door, and Otto took his departure.

Then Fritz, who had watched his movements from the

window, hastily descended the stairs, and left the inn by a back door, which opened on a path leading direct to the pine forest.

The district was well known to him; he was acquainted with every turning of the road and feature of the forest, which indented the open plain as an ocean is marked by its shores. Many years had elapsed since he was an inhabitant of that neighbourhood; but the face of the country, the scenery around, and the windings of the forest were so little changed, that they seemed to him as familiar as if he had never quitted them.

Knowing that Otto Pianalla was bound for Rosenthal Castle—a piece of information which he had gathered from the landlord—Fritz plunged into the mazes of the forest, with the view of gaining, by a short cut, a point in the road which the artist, having to follow a sinuous route, could scarcely reach before him, although the one was well mounted and the other on foot.

Nor had Fritz miscalculated in this respect; for scarcely had he gained the point desired, when from the dense shade of the trees he observed Pianalla advancing at a gentle trot.

In that particular place the road wound round a high bank which there marked the verge of the forest; and the young artist drew near the ambuscade, little suspecting that an assassin was about to spring upon him from the overhanging shade of verdure, as the tremendous boafings its terrible length from the lofty bough on the traveller in the jungles of Hindoostan.

Fritz grasped in his hand a long dagger, round the handle of which was fastened the emblematic cord; and the moment Otto was within his reach, he sprang furiously upon him from amidst the trees that crowned the bank.

But, fortunately for Otto, the horse, either alarmed by the sudden rustling of the leaves, or obeying an instinctive apprehension of danger, swerved aside; the dagger, aimed at Pianalla's breast, struck harmlessly on the crupper of the saddle; and Fritz fell heavily into the road, from a height of at least twelve feet.

The horse plunged, and its hind legs trampled on the assassin's form before Otto could turn the affrighted animal aside.

Then in another moment the artist dismounted, and to his profound astonishment, recognised the well-known features of Fritz, whom he had seen not only at the convent in the Julian Alps, but also in the tribunal of justice at Vienna.

Drawing a pistol from his belt, Otto stooped over the prostrate man, saying, "Any further attempt at violence will be punished with instant death."

"Fear not, young man," murmured Fritz, in a dying voice; "I am no longer dangerous—nor ever more shall be—to living soul."

"Nay, despair not," exclaimed Otto, returning the pistol to his belt. "I will convey you to the nearest village—I will procure surgical skill to minister to you—and you may yet live to repent of your crimes, which are doubtless many and great."

"No, kind youth—your good offices are vain," said Fritz, writhing in agony upon his back. "I feel that my ribs are broken—they press upon my heart—I am dying! But is it possible? Can you feel compassion for one who ere now sought your life?"

"I forgive you—cordially, sincerely forgive you," said Otto, pressing the hand of the dying wretch. "Let not the thought of your design on my life trouble the last moments of yours; but look on me as a friend—tell me if there be aught that I can do to relieve your dying agony of a single pang."

"Yes—yes—there is," murmured Fritz, in a low and feeble tone. "Put your hand into the bosom of my doublet:—there—do you not feel a something sewn between the cloth and the lining? It is a sealed packet—take it—and, as you value the request of one who implores you with his last breath, give it into the hands of—of—"

"Of whom?" asked Otto, eagerly perceiving that the spirit of the dying man was fast ebbing away.

"The—the—Archduchess Maria—"

"I hear—I understand you—I swear to obey your injunction!" cried Otto. "Is there aught else—"

"One word, young man," said Fritz, in a scarcely audible tone, while his features were already convulsed with the agonies of death; "beware of—of Father Anselm! He is your mortal enemy."

"Was it he who instigated you to attempt my life?" inquired Pianalla, hastily.

"Yes," murmured Fritz; "and he is now at Linsdorf

Castle. Avoid—avoid— Oh! merciful heavens! I am dying—I—"

His lips quivered for a few moments, as if he were anxious to say something more; then his under jaw slowly fell—his eyes became glazed with the film of death—a convulsive shuddering was visible throughout his frame—and with a low, gurgling rattle in his throat, he breathed his last.

Otto gazed for a few moments, in silent passiveness, upon the corpse; and then he offered up a prayer to heaven, in gratitude for his own escape from the assassin's dagger, and in behalf of the soul that had just winged its flight to those far-off mansions where alone may be revealed the mystery of eternity.

When this pious duty was accomplished, Otto took his dagger and ripped open the doublet of the departed sinner. As he had been led to expect, he found a small packet, in a parchment envelope, carefully tied with silk thread, and sealed, but without any address or superscription.

Pianalla secured the packet about his person, and then removed the corpse to the side of the road, where he covered it with green boughs, in order to conceal it until he could send persons to inter it decently, and with funeral ceremonies.

As he was returning to the spot where his steed was patiently standing, his eyes fell upon the dagger that had fallen from the hands of Fritz. The emblematic cord instantly reminded him of the dread truth that he was marked as a victim by the Holy Vehm—for some time previously he had received a summons by Cord and Dagger, but which he had boldly disobeyed; for this young man put his trust entirely in God! Then also he remembered the hints which Mildreda had dropped in the Capuchin convent in respect to Father Anselm, and the suspicions which those hints had engendered in his mind relative to the priest's connexion with the Bloody League.

"I understand it all!" thought Otto, not without a sentiment of alarm. "This Father Anselm nurses a bitter hate against me for the part I played in delivering Theodore von Czernin from his power, and exposing the secrets of his stronghold. He has marked me for his victim; and the agents of the Vehm are employed to track me! But God's will be done!"

Otto crossed himself with pious resignation; and picking up the dagger that had been aimed at his breast, he hastened to conceal it beneath the same boughs that covered the corpse close by.

Then, once more mounting his horse, he rode hastily towards Rosenthal Castle.

## CHAPTER LXV.

### THE BARON OF ROSENTHAL AND OTTO PIANALLA.

THE Baron of Rosenthal was walking on the ramparts of his castle when Otto Pianalla, who had left his steed in charge of one of the dependants of the establishment, approached him.

"Ah! is it indeed you, good Otto?" exclaimed the Baron, as the young man saluted him deferentially.

"I come from Vienna, my lord," replied the artist; "and the Countess of Aurana has honoured me with the care of letters for your lordship."

"Then are you doubly welcome, young man," said the nobleman, receiving the packet which Otto presented to him. "How fares my sweet daughter?"

"Her ladyship is well in health," answered Pianalla.

"In health!" exclaimed the Baron; "and in mind also, I hope. Is it not so? Speak, young man—I conjure you."

"Since your lordship thus urges me," said the artist, "I must fain confess that the Lady Theresa is not so gay as was once her wont. But doubtless the letters which your lordship holds in your hands—"

"True! they will no doubt afford explanations," interrupted the Baron. "I will retire to my own apartment and peruse them, while you partake of refreshments after your journey. Our henchman will take good care of you, young man; and, so soon as your meal be over, I shall be glad of your presence in my room, that we may discourse on the contents of these letters—whatever they be."

Otto bowed, and withdrew; and the Baron repaired to his own private apartment.

As Pianalla was retracing his way along the ramparts towards the nearest flight of steps leading into the courtyard, and while turning the angle of a watch-tower, he suddenly encountered a lady whose face was concealed

by a dark veil, but whose elegant form had something so commanding though exquisitely graceful in its appearance, that Otto doffed his hat as she passed him.

With a courteous bow did she acknowledge this homage to her sex; and from behind her veil she darted a penetrating glance on the handsome countenance of the young artist.

Then she passed rapidly onward—and Otto involuntarily followed her with his eyes; for there was something so dignified and yet so harmonious in her motions—something so noble and yet so sweetly captivating in her gait, that he felt himself compelled, as it were by an invincible attraction, to linger with his looks on that elegant form.

Of her countenance he had not caught the slightest glimpse—so closely was it veiled; but he felt convinced that such an exquisitely modelled figure, such a well-turned ankle, and such a diminutive foot, did not belong to one who had any reason to be ashamed of her face.

The lady pursued her way for a short distance, and then suddenly turned her head.

It was impossible that she could have failed to observe the attention with which the young artist was following her with his eyes: for there he was—still rivetted to the spot where she had first met him, and still holding his hat in his hand.

Otto—annoyed, vexed with himself for having been detected in what he deemed to be the unpardonable rudeness into which an unaccountable feeling of curiosity had betrayed him,—and chagrined, moreover, to think that he had even manifested an undue degree of interest in the stranger-lady at all,—Otto retreated rapidly round the angle of the watch-tower.

He was well acquainted with the interior of Rosenthal Castle, which he had frequently visited during the time that his sister Ida was an attendant on the Lady Theresa; and thus he was not only enabled to find his way with ease to the buttery, but was also well received by the officer who presided over that department of the Baron's extensive household.

Having refreshed himself with the good things that were speedily served up to him, he repaired to the private apartment of the Baron.

"Be seated, good Otto," said the nobleman, when Pianalla made his appearance. "I have read the letters which my daughter has sent by your hands, and I cannot assert with truth that the contents are inspiring. Theresa is not happy, Otto," continued the Baron, after a few moments' pause; "and, although she does not tell me as much in plain terms, I were blind did I not read the lamentable fact in almost every sentence of her letters. Now speak openly, Otto—I implore you to speak freely:—what reason has my daughter Theresa to be less happy than she should be—than she ought to be?"

"My lord," said Otto, in a serious tone, "it is not for a humble individual like myself to judge of the actions of powerful nobles; but—since your lordship commands me to speak without reserve—"

"I do not command you, young man," interrupted the Baron: "I implore you as—as a friend."

This was a great concession for the proud and haughty lord of Rosenthal to make towards an artist; but the old nobleman loved his daughter, and his paternal feelings predominated over his pride. Thus was he prepared to see and receive in the light of a friend an individual who could enter with becoming sympathy into the nature of those feelings.

"Yes—Otto, as a friend I implore you to speak without reserve," repeated the Baron; "and that you may satisfy—or at least, enlighten my mind on certain points, I will direct your attention to particular passages in my daughter's letters."

With these words, the Baron of Rosenthal spread open the Lady Theresa's correspondence upon the table; and Otto prepared to listen with due attention.

"In the first place," continued the Baron, "my daughter seems to reproach herself for a feeling which is certainly very unaccountable, and which is in many ways calculated to cause her much mental annoyance. She opens her heart to me as a child should to an affectionate father; and I can suppose that tears stood in her eyes when she penned those lines which acquaint me with the extraordinary fact that she has conceived a far greater affection for the infant son of the Archduke than she entertains for her own daughter."

"When I had the honour to visit her ladyship previous to my departure from Vienna," said Otto, "she communicated to me the circumstance to which your lordship alludes. I do not attempt to conceal from your lordship

the pain—the anguish with which the Countess made that revelation, and implored my opinion.' But there is another remarkable fact which must be coupled with the former. This is the preference which the Archduchess manifests towards the young Adela over her own son Maximilian."

"Unaccountable!—most unaccountable!" exclaimed the Baron. "These two facts defy conjecture."

"I have pondered much upon them, and can arrive at no feasible solution," observed Otto. "At the same time the human heart is so strangely constituted, and is a prey to so many invincible caprices—"

"But Theresa who is so good, and Maria whom I always knew so mild and gentle," interrupted the Baron,—"to think that hearts so pure and virtuous as theirs should become the abiding-places of such caprices as these!"

"The temptations of the Evil One are directed against the good at all times, as well as the wicked," observed Pianalla.

"Alas! Theresa deserves to be happy," said the Baron; "for she possesses an amiable heart. But I need scarcely inform you, Messer Pianalla, that I never countenanced her love for Wilhelm Faust. He won her from me by a kind of stratagem—by a variety of strange circumstances, in fine, which have often and often, since they occurred, been the topic of long hours of meditation on my part. Springing suddenly from obscurity and poverty to rank and fortune—Ah! I must confess that I have been sorely troubled at the thoughts which have intruded themselves upon my idle hours. And now,—for here is another point of sad interest in Theresa's letters,—now to think that she begins to fear he does not love her as he used to do—to think, I say, that she should have cause even to glance for a moment at such an idea,—this, Otto, is as much as to declare on her part that he is not so kind to her as he ought to be."

The Baron spoke with warmth; but tears were in his eyes—for, though he possessed a hard and even cruel heart in many respects, he was deeply attached to his only child.

"Her ladyship fears lest the Count of Aurana be devoured with some secret care," said Otto. "Her ladyship conceives that her husband is not himself happy;—and this idea is sufficient to rend her generous and too sensitive heart."

"What can make him miserable—unless it be a guilty conscience?" exclaimed the Baron of Rosenthal. "He is in high favour at the Court; the Archduke is his bosom friend;—the wealth of the Count of Aurana is now proverbial throughout Germany. How, then, can he be unhappy? Has he committed a crime? Did he rise to rank and fortune by dishonourable means? Did he perpetrate some deed of blackness wherewith to obtain the means of purchasing that vast estate which gave him his title and his influence in the empire? There is one point in Theresa's letters which is a little remarkable. She alludes in sorrowful terms to the indifference which her husband manifests in respect to religious duties."

"Her ladyship is not singular in that observation," said Otto. "All Vienna has noticed—and every old woman's tongue repeats the tale, with such comment as only an old woman's tongue could utter—that the Count of Aurana maintains no chaplain in his household, and never attends a place of worship. We he less powerful than he is, the ecclesiastical authorities would call him to an account on that point. But let us not judge harshly—too harshly of him, my lord. He may dislike the ceremony of public worship, and yet not the less pray in secret. He may shrink from confession to a priest, and yet commune with his own heart."

"Good!" said the Baron: "let us suppose that it is so. Still, for the mere sake of complying with the usages of great nobles, should he keep a chaplain in his household. It is not well—it is not wise—it is not prudent, Otto, to fly in the face of the Church."

"The Count may behave unwisely—imprudently, my lord," said Otto; "but let us not hasten to the conclusion that he acts with wicked intentions."

"You are a good youth," observed the Baron; "but the charity of your disposition passes all reasonable limits. Were it not that I am compelled to remain upon my estate, to protect it from that ever watchful enemy of mine, the Lord of Linsdorf—I would repair to Vienna, and learn from my daughter's own lips the positive causes of that unhappiness which is doubtless oppressing her. Her husband might, nevertheless, permit her to come and pass a few months under the paternal roof. I will write to him to that effect. How long dost thou count upon remaining in these parts?"

"But a very few days, my lord," answered Pianalla. "I have one paramount duty to perform—to place a stone upon my mother's grave! It is also my intention to visit a few of my former companions, and succour those who are not so prosperous as I could wish them to be," added the young artist, in a modest tone. "My own position is assured for the future; and I can even afford to spare somewhat towards relieving the wants of the industrious and deserving."

"And while you remain in this neighbourhood, good youth," said the Baron, "let my Castle be your home. On your return to Vienna, I shall charge you with letters for the Count of Aurana and my daughter."

"It was my original intention to pass a few weeks in these parts, which are endeared to me by many memories associated with my childhood," observed Otto; "but a particular circumstance, which occurred this morning—and which I will presently detail to your lordship—must hurry my return to Vienna. In the meantime, I accept with grateful thanks the generous hospitality of your lordship's abode."

"In that case—and since you will now become an inmate of Rosenthal during your good pleasure, young man," said the Baron, "I must inform you that I have been induced, by special commands from his Imperial Majesty Maximilian the First, to accord refuge to a persecuted foreign family of high rank. Driven from their own country, they sought the hospitality of Germany; but the Emperor deemed it not prudent to receive these high-born fugitives in his capital. He accordingly thought fit to assign them a dwelling at a considerable distance from Vienna; and he was graciously pleased to honour my poor abode by designating it as the place where this exiled Prince and his sister, of whom I am speaking, might find a safe refuge from the pursuit of their enemies. The Princess has already arrived; and I expect his Highness, her brother, in the course of a few days—or, I may indeed say, every hour. I merely mention this much to you, that you may be prepared to see illustrious guests at the Castle."

While the Baron was yet speaking, Otto recalled to mind not only the veiled lady whom he had seen upon the ramparts, but also the wounded Prince whom he had left at the Black Swan.

It will be remembered that the words "my lord" and "your Highness" were frequently mentioned in Otto's presence by the dependant of the wounded Prince; but the actual name of that illustrious personage had not escaped Michelotto's lips; and Otto's curiosity was neither powerful nor impertinent enough to induce him to request information on that head. He therefore remained in ignorance of the fact that he had actually been in the presence of that terrible Caesar Borgia, who had filled the world with his bad fame: nevertheless, the apparent connexion between the Baron's statement and that wounded Prince now struck him so forcibly that he immediately related all that had occurred in reference to his Highness's arrival at the Black Swan.

"And you are ignorant of the name of that wounded Prince?" cried the Baron.

"Entirely so," answered Pianalla.

"Ah! he would doubtless remain unknown," mused the Baron; "and his dependant must have been betrayed by habit into the utterance of those cremonious titles of address which alone met your ears. Yes—it is evidently so: for the Princess who is now here, also arrived in a humble manner—with but few attendants—and desired that her name might not transpire. I must therefore be secret on that head. But it behoves me without delay to repair to Kemberg, and ensure the speedy conveyance of the wounded Prince to the Castle."

Thus speaking, the Baron rose hastily from his seat.

"One word, my lord—if it meet your good pleasure," said Otto. "I have yet somewhat to communicate—inasmuch as I must implore the aid of some of your dependants to fetch hither for Christian burial the body of a wretched man who has died from the consequences of an attempt upon my life only a few hours ago, and from whose lips I received a solemn injunction which is the cause of hastening my return to Vienna."

The Baron surveyed Otto Pianalla with looks of unfeigned astonishment, as the latter uttered these words; but the young artist soon made him acquainted with those particulars, relative to the attack upon him by Fritz, which are already known to the reader.

"The power of the Vehm is terrible," said the Baron, in a low tone; "but I have defied it as you have done. Nevertheless, no time must be lost in bringing hither the corpse of that miscreant who so justly met his death

while attempting your life. You shall at once proceed to the spot with two of my trustiest servitors and fetch the body. We will give it Christian burial; and this night Father Christopher shall see it decently interred in the chapel of the Castle. I shall now ride to Kemberg; do you, good youth, divert yourself as best you can. My abode is your home."

Otto expressed his gratitude for this kind intimation, and withdrew.

In a quarter of an hour the Baron, attended by six well-armed retainers, was galloping along the road towards the Black Swan at Kemberg.

## CHAPTER LXVI.

### FATHER ANSELM AND THE COUNT OF LINSDFORD.

WE must now return to Father Anselm, who, it will be remembered, had set off very early in the morning on a visit to Linsdorf Castle, while Fritz had remained at the inn for the purpose of watching the motions of Otto Pianalla.

Little suspecting the fate that was in store for his staunch and devoted instrument Fritz, Father Anselm pursued his way through the pine-forest, and shortly reached Linsdorf Castle.

Many years had elapsed since he had last trod that path; and his condition was marvellously changed.

"It seems but the other day that I first entered the service of Manfred," said Father Anselm to himself, as he walked towards the gate of the Castle. "Then I was a miserable being—an outcast who had suffered the ignominy of a public execution, and had come back to life and light again as it were by a miracle! I felt like a stranger in the wide world: my only hope was in Count Manfred, under whom I had formerly served in the army. But I knew him well—I was not mistaken in him. I read his dark soul. He was not a Count then: but he wished to be! He was not the owner nor the inhabitant of this lordly dwelling: but he also aspired to be that! I guessed it all—I divined every thought that occupied his mind. Oh: how well I remember seeking him in his comparatively humble abode some leagues from hence, and offering him my services. I told him all that concerned myself: he wanted such an instrument as I was prepared to be;—he accepted me as his dependant—he granted me his protection—he initiated me as a member of the Bloody League. And then, when the time came, how well I did his bidding and made him Count and owner of Linsdorf! But how did he reward me? Confident that my life was in his hands—presuming on the possession of my secret,—a secret that ever made me tremble lest it should be revealed,—the Count indulged his naturally tyrannical disposition in oppressing me. Ah! it was a fortunate day for me, when—wearied with his goading despotism—I induced Hugo to become the companion of my flight from Linsdorf! The garb of a priest enabled me to seek my fortunes elsewhere; and in time I became the Superior of the Convent in the Alps—while Hugo still followed my steps. And then came my connection with the Borgias—an intimacy which gave me wealth, and which, had Caesar been faithful to his word, should have raised me to eminence. And now—now," thought Anselm, as he paused at the gate of the Castle,—"now I return to these walls, a Chief of the Vehm and the bearer of a rescript which places the haughty Lord of Linsdorf in my power!"

A smile of triumph played upon the dark and repulsive countenance of this bold bad man, as he thus wound up those reflections which were so naturally excited by a revisit to scenes that he had many and grave reasons to remember full well.

Father Anselm crossed the drawbridge, and reached the inner gate.

"Who comes?" cried a sentinel, throwing forward his halberd.

"I seek the Lord of Linsdorf," said Anselm.

"Pass, holy father," exclaimed the sentinel, shouldering his weapon once more, and standing aside.

Father Anselm pursued his way, with his cowl drawn far over his countenance; for, in case any of the Count's retainers had been contemporaneous in that nobleman's service with himself, he did not choose to be remembered by them.

In due time he obtained admission into an apartment where Count Manfred was sitting alone, occupied with some papers of consequence.

The Lord of Linsdorf was much changed since Anselm had last seen him nineteen years previously:—but there was still the same stern, uncompromising expression of countenance—the same fire in the piercing eye—the same malignant expression of the lip—the same compression of

the lowering brows. Though time had mingled with grey the dark hair of the Count and reduced the bulk of his muscular form, it had not touched his bad heart nor brought to his soul compunction for his manifold misdeeds.

"Good morrow, holy father!" cried the Count, glancing casually at Anselm, as he entered. "To what am I to attribute the honour of this visit? If thou thinkest I need ghostly comfort, thou art in error—for I have within my walls a worthy chaplain who will patter a dozen aces and recite as many credos as glibly as he will empty a wine-flask."

"Cease this ribald nonsense, Count Manfred!" exclaimed the visitor; then, flinging back his cowl, he added, "Dost thou not remember me?"

"What!—is it possible?" cried the Count, half rising from his seat, and bending his brows in a sinister manner as he looked from beneath them up to Anselm's countenance. "Can it be my old servant Ulric Kinis—or rather Felix Zetter, as thou didst afterwards call thyself!"

"I am that same individual, my lord," returned the priest, in a proud tone. "But to neither name which thou hast mentioned do I answer now. Hast ever heard of one Father Anselm?"

"Ay, marry, have I!" said Manfred of Linsdorf. "He is a powerful chief of the Vehm, whereof you are only a humble dependant. But I was wrong to speak of a great Free Count to one who is but a servant, and not a master, of the Tribunal. However, I need not fear that thou, of all men, will report my want of caution elsewhere."

"Ever hasty—ever imprudent!" exclaimed Father Anselm; "even forgetful of our fundamental laws!"

"Ah! what mean you, insolent?" cried the Count, again half starting from his seat, while his eyes flashed fire.

"Calm yourself, my lord," returned the priest, waving him back in an authoritative manner. "Your lordship may speak freely to me—for I am now one of the Chiefs."

Then Anselm made the sign of the cross, and murmuring "Blessed be the Holy Vehm!" pointed with his thumb rapidly towards his chest—a symbolic expression that he should deserve death by the dagger if he proved unfaithful to the Secret Tribunal for which he so solemnly invoked heaven's favour.

This was the sign for a Free Count of the terrible fraternity.

"Be seated, brother," said the Count of Linsdorf, in a more respectful tone than he had hitherto assumed; "you are indeed one of those mighty Chiefs who overawe the proudest and wealthiest, and make the guilty tremble. Then art thou as familiar as myself with the name of Father Anselm, of whom thou didst ere now speak; and if—as I suspect—thou comest from that great man who wields the power of the Vehm in the Carniolan district, and who has even made its tremendous influence to be felt in Italy—if thou comest from him, I say, thou art doubly welcome. In any case might the distinction which existed in former days between your rank and mine be forgotten; for, as a Free Count, I am bound to receive thee as a brother."

"And to acknowledge me as a superior," said Anselm, coolly.

"How?" cried Manfred, angrily. "I have yet to learn that one who must necessarily be my junior in the hierarchy by some years can become my superior. But say—dost thou come to me from Father Anselm of Carniola?"

"I am Father Anselm, Free Count of Carniola," was the proud reply, which made Lord Manfred start with the most unfeigned astonishment. "Listen to me, brother," continued the priest:—"the Supreme Council of Westphalia has long been dissatisfied with the mode in which you administer the sway of the Vehmgericht in this province. Your numerous errors I might enumerate; but you are doubtless conscious of them. Ere now, even, when I had scarcely been five minutes in your presence, you violated that fundamental law which explicitly declares that 'no Chief of the Vehm, whether Free Count or Free Viscount, Provincial or District Ruler, shall mention the name of another Chief in the presence of a simple member of the Vehm in common conversation, but only when conveying instructions, or discoursing on matters actually interesting the Vehm.' But I care not to dwell on the thousand well-known breaches of formality of which you have been guilty," continued Father Anselm. "I must, however, allude to that fearful error whereof you were culpable, when the Archduke Leopold of Austria was in your power, and when, according to your report to the Supreme Council of Westphalia, he refused to join the Vehm, and to take part in the conspiracy which was at

that time in preparation against his uncle the Emperor Maximilian. Instead of confining him in a deep dungeon, until his stubborn spirit was broken, you adjudged him to death—as if his death would have served the Vehm! No!—it was his life—his life devoted to our purposes—that we required; and think you not that the prospect of sitting upon the throne of the Caesars, in the place of his uncle whom we should have deposed, would have helped to win him over to our views? But you sentenced him to die; and then—behold! your retainers permitted him to escape!"

"I communicated the entire particulars of that event to the Council," said Lord Manfred, in a subdued and humble tone.

"And think you the Council put faith in the marvellous tale you related?" cried Anselm, indignantly. "No—my lord. That a single individual, though with all the accessory terrors of a black cloak," he continued, with bitter irony, "should have been able to strike half-a-dozen stalwart men-at-arms motionless with terror, and thus release the prisoner, was a tale fit for a nursery, but not adapted to obtain credence at the hands of the Supreme Council of the Secret Tribunals of the German Empire."

"And yet my men-at-arms all swore distinctly and positively—aye, and separately, too—to the same unvarying account of that mysterious transaction," observed the Count of Linsdorf.

"They might well be consistent, even when examined separately, in a tale which they had plotted before-hand," said Anselm, with a sarcastic smile; "and which, by the bye, their master might have even prompted himself."

"No: by Heaven, I swear—" began the Count, fire flashing from his eyes.

"Silence, my lord!" cried Anselm, authoritatively. "I am here to dictate—and not to reason. The deplorable error of which you were guilty in respect to the Archduke Leopold, was the main cause that compelled the Vehm to abandon the conspiracy against Maximilian the First."

"And yet the Archduke never breathed a word concerning that transaction," observed the Count: "else had Maximilian taken steps against me, in the first instance; and afterwards—"

"Once more I say Silence!" exclaimed Anselm. "You know not what you urge. Leopold did communicate everything to the Emperor; and Maximilian adopted precautions, but was too wise to irritate the Vehm by persecuting any of its chiefs—or by even appearing to be aware of what had taken place in respect to his nephew. Nay, more—I can inform thee that, as a reward for the service which Leopold rendered his Majesty, in making those private revelations, the marriage of the young Archduke with a girl deemed of lowly birth was recognised, and the young bride was received at court after having lived for some days in obscurity with her husband at Vienna. And of that same girl I have somewhat to tell you, my lord:—but of that to-morrow! For the present all I have to add to my remarks is this—that the Supreme Council of Westphalia is at length convinced of the utter incapacity of Lord Manfred of Linsdorf to execute the high and important office of Free Count of the Holy Vehmgericht, and does depose him to the grade of simple District Ruler accordingly."

As he uttered these words in a solemn and impressive manner, Father Anselm produced the rescript, which he handed to Count Manfred.\*

This nobleman read it with respectful attention; and, swallowing his resentful feelings as best he could, he kissed the document in a deferential manner, saying, "Blessings on the Holy Vehm! The Holy Vehm's decree be obeyed! Blessings on the Holy Vehm!"

While he was fulfilling this humiliating ceremony, the eagle eyes of Father Anselm were fixed with savage triumph upon him.

"And now," said Anselm, after a short pause, "in the name of the Vehm, I command you to send forthwith a strong body of your retainers to the *Black Swan* inn of the village of Kemberg; there they shall seize upon two strange Italians, one of whom is wounded on the forehead. Having carefully secured them, your men must bring them hither without delay. And let this be done in the way I have ordained."

"You shall be obeyed," answered the Count of Linsdorf. He then left the room to issue the necessary orders for this expedition.

\*The reader must not confound the rank of Count (as a nobleman of the German Empire) which Manfred bore, with that of Free Count of the Vehm. Over the former the Secret Tribunal had of course not the slightest control.



## CHAPTER LXVII.

## OTTO PIANALLA AND THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

GREAT was the astonishment and deep was the indignation of the Baron of Rosenthal, when on his arrival, with his retainers, at the Black Swan, he was informed by Ludwig, the hump-backed ostler, that the foreign Prince and his dependant had been carried off some hours previously by an armed party of Count Manfred's household.

"What motive was alleged for this outrage?" demanded the Baron.

"None, my lord," answered Ludwig. "The Prince had so far recovered as to be able to rise and walk about, supporting himself on the arm of his attendant; and a litter was being got ready to convey his Highness to your lordship's castle, when the inn was suddenly entered by the armed serfs of Count Manfred; and without uttering a word, they took the Prince and his servant prisoners."

"And did not his Highness protest against that ruffianly treatment?" asked the Baron.

"Yes, my lord," replied Ludwig; "and his follower drew his sword, swearing that he would never leave the room alive as a prisoner. But neither remonstrance nor threat was of any avail with Count Manfred's men: they held their tongues and performed their mission in silence; and in a few minutes both Prince and servitor were on their way to Linsdorf."

"How know you that the ruffians conveyed their prisoners to Linsdorf?" cried the Baron.

"Ah! that is a conjecture on my part, saying your lordship's presence," returned the ostler. "But as the men were Count Manfred's, and as they took the nearest path to Linsdorf through the forest, when they rode away with their prisoners, it is only rational to suppose that they proceeded with their captives to the Castle."

"Good!" cried the Baron: "your reasoning suits so well with all we know of Count Manfred, and of his readiness to perpetrate the most outrageous and daring deeds, that it is doubtless as you say."

Then, tossing a piece of gold to Ludwig, the Baron turned his horse's head towards Rosenthal, and retraced his way thither, followed by his dependants.

But the nobleman was sadly embarrassed what course to pursue. He was unwilling to take any step that might provoke a renewal of hostilities with a chief who was not only powerful in legitimate warfare, but who was also known to possess so many secret means of advancing his own cause, and undermining that of an enemy. On the other hand, the commands of the Emperor to the Baron Rosenthal were imperative. Maximilian had constituted him not only the host but also the protector of Cæsar Borgia and his sister; for his Imperial Majesty was well aware that such an enterprising spirit as that of the Duke of Valentinois might sooner or later recover all that power and influence in Italy which were lost for the present; and, looking at the probability of such a result, the Emperor was too prudent to make Cæsar his enemy. Thus, when the Duke, finding his cause hopeless after the elevation of Julian de la Rovere to the papal throne, and having vainly endeavoured to recover possession of the Romagna, was compelled to fly into Germany, the Emperor had willingly acceded to his demand for protection in the imperial dominions, on condition, however, that the Duke should fix himself wherever the Emperor might think fit to indicate an asylum. For Maximilian was too prudent to permit his capital, or any of the great cities of his empire, to be made the scene of the intrigues of the Borgias. His Majesty had therefore determined on Rosenthal Castle, as a safe and distant stronghold, where the Borgias might remain during their pleasure; and as soon as this arrangement was communicated to Cæsar, he sent off a trusty messenger to Ferrara, to desire his sister Lucrezia to hasten into Germany and join him at Rosenthal.

The reader may now comprehend wherefore the Baron was mightily perplexed at the outrage committed against a Prince who enjoyed the special protection of Maximilian; for the nobleman was naturally averse to plunge into a feudal warfare with the Count of Linsdorf on behalf of one who had no other claims on his favour than the recommendation of the Emperor.

On his return to the Castle he shut himself up with Dewitz and the chaplain in his private apartment; and the trio deliberated on the subject of the Baron's embarrassment.

In the meantime, Otto Pianalla had proceeded with some of the Baron's retainers to the spot where he had

concocted the corpse of Fritz; but his humane intentions of giving it Christian burial were frustrated—for the body had been removed!

The boughs with which he had covered it were scattered about; and there were marks of many footsteps upon the ground, leading from the place where the corpse had been deposited by Otto, into the depths of the pine-forest.

"The remains of the poor wretch must have been speedily discovered after I had concealed them there," said Pianalla; "but those who have taken the trouble to convey the corpse away will doubtless give it Christian burial. We have naught to do, my friends, save to retrace the path to Rosenthal."

This intimation was immediately obeyed; and the little party rode back to the Castle.

It was now approaching the time of sunset; and Otto sought the ramparts of the fortress, alike to meditate upon the incidents of the day, and to view the descent of the orb of light behind the blue hills that formed the rugged outline of the western horizon.

"The hour of sunset—how many varied thoughts and emotions does its presence excite!" mused Otto aloud to himself. "The son of toil hails it as the signal for quitting the ploughshare or laying aside the implements of his craft, and returning to his cottage, where the smiles of an affectionate wife and the shouts of joyous children welcome him home. The bandit and the bravo view with ferocious satisfaction the approach of that congenial darkness which cloaks their deeds. The mariner's wife looks forth from her lattice upon the ocean, thinks of the loved one who is afar off in the frail vessel, and sighs deeply—deeply, as she murmurs to herself, '*Now is the hour of storms!*' The prisoner doomed to ascend the scaffold to-morrow, contemplates with awe and terror those beams that every moment quiver more and more faintly through the grated window of his dungeon; and, as they play upon the stone wall on the other side of the cell, they appear to be the finger of God tracing thereon the appalling words, '*This is the last sunset thou shalt ever see!*' The votary of pleasure beholds the sinking orb, and rejoices; for the hour is now at hand when his dull eye may be again lighted up and his parching throat refreshed with the rich red wine. The hermit on the mountain side seeks the threshold of his lone grotto, and turning his pale countenance towards the west, so that the beams may play upon his furrowed brow, pours forth his gratitude to heaven for the food and other mercies vouchsafed throughout the day. Now, too, the maiden—casting hurried and bashful looks around her—seeks the garden or the grove to listen to that delicious language of the heart which makes the nightingale tune its notes in vain. Nor less, at this moment, is the bed of death a scene of profound and touching interest—where the spirit of the exhausted invalid is painfully conscious of the anguish of near relatives and dear friends weeping around, and feels also the conviction that, ere the sun, whose flickering beams yet play faintly on his pallid countenance, shall have risen again, his soul will have left its mortal tenement and winged its way to those realms where the mysteries of Eternity can alone be read!"

"It is a pity that you are not a poet as well as painter," said a voice close by Otto's side.

The artist turned hastily round, for the tone was familiar to him; and, by the dying rays of the sunlight, he recognised the venerable form and the benevolent countenance of the old man who had visited him in his garret in Vienna, and employed him to administer the antidote to the Countess of Aurana.

"The glories of Nature ever awaken in my mind an enthusiasm of which I am not ashamed," answered Otto.

"And the contemplation of which prompts you to good deeds," said the old man, with something like a sneer.

"I cannot boast of good deeds, sir," returned Otto, meekly; "but I do not hesitate to confess that when I gaze upon all the wonders and beauties of Nature, I behold in them a wise, a beneficent, and an omnipotent God, of whose favour I endeavour, humble though I be, to render myself worthy."

"Ah!—a judicious endeavour," said the old gentleman, drily. "It is now some time—nay, a long time—since we met; and on that occasion—"

"You gave me an appointment which I regret that you did not keep," added Pianalla.

"Oh! there was another thousand crowns due to you," exclaimed the old man, with a sneer; "and you doubtless felt aggrieved at my want of punctuality."

"No, sir," returned Otto, proudly; "such a selfish thought never entered my imagination. I wished to see you again, because I had much to thank you for:—you

raised me from the depths of misery to prosperity and happiness; and I toiled day after day—aye, and with a joyous heart, too—to perfect the picture which you condescended to admire.”

“And finding that I never came back to claim the Achilles and pay the remainder of the purchase-money, you doubtless disposed of your work elsewhere?”

“Pardon me, sir, if I say that you wrong me by those suspicions,” exclaimed Otto. “I would scorn to do a dishonest or an ungrateful action. No—the picture still remains for you in Vienna: it now hangs in the mansion of the Baron of Czernin; but that nobleman will deliver it up to you upon application to him for that purpose. As for the remainder of the purchase-money, I would not consent to receive it on any account. You have more than amply paid me already. Oh! you know not how great has been the prosperity that has attended my steps since the day you first sought me in my miserable garret. The sum you then gave me—the confidence with which you then inspired me,—in a word, your generous conduct towards the obscure and friendless artist, was the groundwork of my fortune. So soon as I had completed your picture, I set out on an excursion through Carniola, your purse having provided me with the means to gratify my taste for travel. In the Julian Alps I experienced a variety of strange adventures, which resulted in the deliverance of the Baron of Czernin from captivity, and made that nobleman my friend. Thus, you perceive, I owe you a deep debt of gratitude; for to you may be attributed that favourable change in my fortunes. How, then, sir, could I entertain a single selfish thought in reference to yourself—since I labour under immense obligations to you, and moreover am beyond the want of gold?”

“I am pleased to see that you have found me really useful to you,” said the old man. “You express towards me the gratitude of words:—are you equally ready to demonstrate that honourable feeling by deeds?”

“Tell me, sir, in which way I can serve you,” exclaimed Otto, eagerly; “and—as I feel convinced that one so generous and humane as yourself could not propose anything to me that I may not safely undertake—”

“A truce to compliments, young man,” interrupted the eccentric stranger, in a severe tone: “I dislike them.”

“Truth is no compliment, when uttered by a grateful heart,” said Otto. “But lest you should think that I am desirous of escaping, by quibbling qualifications and conditions, from the duty of serving you, I pray you to state at once in what manner you require my humble aid.”

“I will tell you in a few words,” returned the old man. “There is within these walls a Princess in whose affairs I am deeply interested. Do you know who she is?”

“I am aware that a lady of that rank is now dwelling in Rosenthal Castle,” replied Otto; “but I am ignorant of her name.”

“Then seek not to know it,” said the stranger, hastily; “so shall you serve her with a sincerity not chilled by prejudice. At this very moment the Baron of Rosenthal is communicating to her tidings of an unpleasant nature. She will require a friend—a staunch friend. Be you that friend to her.”

“Name the manner in which I can serve her,” exclaimed Otto; “and you will see whether I shall hesitate to prove my gratitude to you by my zeal in the cause of that lady.”

“She will explain her own affairs to you,” said the venerable stranger. “Particular circumstances, which I cannot now reveal, involve the present subject of conversation in some degree of mystery, and compel me to warn you how to act in certain respects with regard to that illustrious Princess.”

“Speak, sir: I am not disposed to obey you only by halves. In all that is fair and honourable, command me,” said the artist.

“In the first place, you must not allude, in the presence of any one, to our meeting this evening.”

“I have not even the honour of knowing the name of my benefactor,” said Otto.

“Nor is it necessary that you should know it,” returned the old man, sharply.

“And yet it were pleasant to remember it in my prayers,” added the artist.

“Prayers!” repeated the eccentric stranger, with a tone and manner that seemed singular to his young companion. “But do not interrupt me thus. If you wish to serve me, serve me in my own way—or I shall not be served at all by aught that you may do. I warn you, then, not to speak of me to a living soul, nor to inform the Princess that you have been induced to espouse her cause by the representations of another.”

“I will obey you in all respects, sir—as by duty bound,” said Otto: “but pardon me if I observe that I am totally unknown to this Princess—that I may never have speech of her—and that she cannot be aware of my readiness to serve her, unless perhaps you yourself—”

“I wish you to trust to circumstances to render her communicative, and give you an occasion to offer your assistance,” interrupted the old man. “This night—two hours hence, when the Castle is tranquil—the Princess will walk on this side of the rampart. Take care to be here:—the rest will follow.”

With these words the stranger hurried away in so precipitate a manner that Otto had no opportunity to make any remark nor ask any further explanation in respect to the service so mysteriously demanded of him.

He nevertheless resolved to obey the old man’s instructions; for he naturally considered him to be a benevolent and humane, though somewhat eccentric individual, who chose to do good by stealth.

A few minutes after the termination of this interview between Otto Pianalla and the stranger, Lucreza Borgia retired from a saloon where she had been for about half an hour in earnest conversation with the Baron of Rosenthal.

On entering her own private apartment, she found a note lying upon the table, and addressed to herself.

The writing was bold and clear, but totally unknown to her.

Hastily tearing open the letter, she read as follows:—

“The position of your brother, and the timid conduct of the Baron, render it necessary for you to secure the aid of some firm, brave, and skilful individual. Such a person is now an inmate of Rosenthal Castle. He is not altogether unknown to you by name. Two hours hence he will be alone on the western rampart: hesitate not to speak to him. In the course of the conversation you can explain the position of your brother; and the chivalrous disposition of Otto Pianalla will immediately prompt him to offer his services. But beware how you mention the name of Borgia, for Otto practises virtue! All that he as yet knows of you is that you are a Princess: he has moreover seen your brother at Kemberg, and is aware that he is a Prince. But of your names and titles he is ignorant. If you wish him to serve you, let him remain so. One more word of caution:—burn this letter as soon as read—and hint not to Otto Pianalla that you have received any suggestion to confide in him.

“A FRIEND.”

“A friend!” repeated Lucreza: “have the Borgias, then, a friend? If so, wherefore should he conceal himself? why should he write thus mysteriously—thus anonymously? But of that no matter! The hint conveyed in this letter is a good one. Yes—Otto Pianalla is brave, determined, and persevering: else never had he effected the release of Theodore von Czernin from his prison in the Julian Alps. He practises virtue, and would shrink from the name of Borgia: that is the meaning of the writer. But is he proof against the fascinations of beauty? can he withstand the allurements of woman’s loveliness and woman’s wiles? That sad reverse of fortune which has deprived me of power and made me an exile, has not robbed me of those charms which are alike my pride and the most effective of all my weapons! And those charms remain; for Lucreza Borgia still is beautiful—beautiful as ever!”

And as the Princess pronounced these words aloud, she surveyed herself with pride in a large mirror, which reflected her lovely countenance and her admirable symmetry of form.

“Yes,” she continued after a pause: “Otto Pianalla shall become my agent—my instrument to effect the deliverance of my brother! It was strange—passing strange, that this young man should have already been in my thoughts ever since I met him on the ramparts at noon. When I first beheld him in the court of justice at Vienna, I was struck with his handsome countenance—his fine dark eyes—his sweetly expressive mouth—his graceful figure—and to-day, when I again saw him, I thought he had even improved in appearance. And he—on his part—stood to gaze after me,—he who could obtain no glimpse of my countenance! Ah! if he were struck by the symmetry of my form, he is already half my slave. It now, then, remains for me to secure his entire and complete devotion to my cause and to myself! He practises virtue,” she added, with a contemptuous curl of the lip;—“practises virtue in a world where

virtue is so unusual! Then is he a kind of savage whom Lucreza Borgia must undertake to tame!"

And a triumphant smile revealed the brilliant teeth of a mouth that seemed formed only to distil honey; whereas how venomous was the poison lurking in the language which fell, in soft and musical tones, from that deceptive tongue!

## CHAPTER LXVIII.

### THE TEMPTRESS.

It was a night of a lovely moon and cloudless stars,—heaven's own eternal lamps burning brightly upon the deep purple arch,—when Lucreza Borgia, with the dark veil over her countenance, appeared upon the western rampart of Rosenthal Castle, in pursuance of the advice contained in the letter of her unknown correspondent.

She walked with a firm step, and with her head erect, as if confident of achieving a victory on which she had set her mind, and the anticipation of which was eminently gratifying to her proud soul.

That was no coy girl—no timid maiden now advancing towards the spot where Otto Pianalla, faithful to his promise, was leaning against the parapet:—it was a woman of the most enchanting beauty and of the blackest heart,—a woman strong in the consciousness of her guileful language and her personal loveliness,—a woman who was accustomed calmly to thrust aside all obstacles which appeared in the path that it suited her to pursue.

And so dangerous was that woman,—so fearful was the influence wielded by Lucreza Borgia,—that she could adapt her language and her looks to all occasions:—now languishing with the voluptuous tenderness of love—now assuming the dignity of one born to rule and to command;—at one time melting into tears to touch the soul—at another wearing frowns, and clothing herself with the majesty of anger to overawe the heart;—now persuasive as the voice of poetry—then bitter as the keen eastern blast;—at one moment soft, fascinating, and insidious—at another haughty, dominant, and proud!

Such was the woman whose influence was about to be directed against the heart of Otto Pianalla.

The young artist marked her approach, and was not surprised to observe the same majesty and yet eminently graceful female form which had attracted him a few hours previously on another part of the ramparts of Rosenthal Castle.

And now a hundred questions occurred to the young man's mind.

Who was this Princess? who also was the stranger that had been instrumental in procuring the interview that was about to take place? what service was to be demanded? and wherefore was so much mystery observed?

These and other queries of a similar nature flashed through the brain of Otto Pianalla as he beheld the lady drawing nearer and nearer.

And now she was within a few yards of the spot where he was standing.

By a natural impulse he removed the plumed hat from his head, and deferentially saluted one whom he knew to be of exalted rank.

"Thy silent courtesy merits my thanks, Messer Pianalla," said the Princess, stopping near him.

"Am I then known to your Highness?" asked Otto.

"Did we not encounter each other some few hours ago?" said Lucreza; "and, although it ill becomes one of my sex to compliment an individual of yours, I must fain confess that yours is a countenance which once seen, cannot readily be forgotten. But resume your hat, Messer Pianalla; and, if you have in view no better employment for your time, I pray thee to become my companion during a half-hour's walk which I propose to myself."

All this was said with the easy grace of one who was accustomed to command, and in such a manner that even the compliment itself bore not the slightest tinge of indelicate boldness.

Otto accordingly joined Lucreza Borgia; and they proceeded slowly along the rampart, the temptress still retaining the dark veil over her countenance.

"How beautiful is this starlight!" said Lucreza, after a short pause;—"and in what strong relief do the mighty towers of Rosenthal stand forth! Your native Germany, Messer Pianalla, abounds in these grand feudal edifices—emblems of that chivalry which, alas! is rapidly verging towards complete extinction!"

"Does your Highness conceive that the spirit of German chivalry is less enthusiastic than it was in past times?" exclaimed Otto. "Oh! noble lady, wrong not my country by the suspicion! Wherever there are injuries to avenge

or wrongs to redress, there are still generous hearts and bold hands ready to make the cause of the weak, the defenceless, and the oppressed their own."

"Say you so, Messer Pianalla?" asked Lucreza, in the softest and most touching tones of her musical voice. "Oh! would that I could feel convinced of the truth of your observation! I am well aware that your own generous soul prompted that enthusiastic vindication of your country's chivalry; but you will forgive me if I express a fear that you speak more as you could wish things to be than as they actually are. I know that the sons of Germany are as brave as her daughters are fair: I know that for learning, glory, and all the refinements of the civilization of the age, your native clime can compete with the other lands of Europe—not even excepting mighty France, nor powerful but isolated England. But is not the true spirit of chivalry everywhere expiring? Oh! were it still in its full vigour, is it possible that my own brother, who came to seek the hospitality of your clime, should have been basely carried off and made a prisoner by a proud noble of this district? or is it again possible that I—his sister, and also dependant on your countrymen for protection and a home—should be doomed to deplore that captivity on his part, without a hope that some chivalrous hand will rescue him from his lawless oppressor?"

"And is it possible that such should indeed be the position of your Highness's brother and yourself?" exclaimed Otto, in an enthusiastic but at the same time indignant tone.

"Alas! it is too true!" said Lucreza, her voice assuming a profound melancholy expression. "Have you not heard that the Baron of Rosenthal expected a Prince to become his guest?"

"I have heard that fact, your Highness; and, moreover, I am much mistaken if I did not encounter your brother at the little village at Kemberg."

"Whither he was conveyed—wounded by a midnight robber—by a faithful dependant," said Lucreza. "And it was from the same village that the ruffians of the proud Count of Linsdorf bore him away—heaven knows for what purpose!"

"And the Count of Linsdorf has perpetrated that outrage!" cried Otto. "I have not seen the Baron since he set out for the purpose of bringing your Highness's brother hither; and was therefore unaware of this untoward incident."

"Not only is my brother a captive in Linsdorf Castle—as we have every reason to suppose from the information which the Baron gleaned at Kemberg," continued Lucreza; "but ere now, in an interview which I had with the Lord of Rosenthal—I learnt the sad fact that no immediate measures will be adopted to effect the Prince's release."

"How, lady!" cried the young artist: "does not his lordship purpose to march with all his retainers against the proud Count of Linsdorf, and not only rescue the captive Prince, but also punish him who has thus dared to violate the most sacred principles of German hospitality?"

"The Lord of Rosenthal has expressed to me his aversion to kindle the torch of feudal war in this district," said Lucreza Borgia. "He has despatched a courier to Vienna to communicate to the Emperor all that has occurred, and demand instructions: he has moreover sent to Count Manfred to claim my brother at his hands. But this latter demand will no doubt be disregarded; and how many weary weeks must elapse ere we can hope for the arrival of a reply from his Imperial Majesty Maximilian! In the meantime, my brother—my much-loved brother—must remain a prisoner,—and perhaps subjected to an unworthy and ignominious treatment. Tell me, then, Messer Pianalla,—is chivalry still extant in Germany, when on that side a great noble perpetrates an outrage, and on this side another powerful lord is afraid to avenge it?"

"As I live," exclaimed Otto, "I could not have supposed the Baron of Rosenthal capable of thus meekly abiding the indignity cast upon himself, in the person of his intended guest, by that bold, bad peer who owns the broad lands of Linsdorf! Oh! were I possessed of means or influence—"

"You would hasten to the deliverance of my brother—you would adopt my cause—for it is mine,—I have made it so!" exclaimed Lucreza, laying her hand upon Otto's arm, and clinging to the young artist as if to a defender—a protector—a friend.

"Yes, lady," replied Otto; "I would dare all to serve you in this respect. But I am powerless. I—"

"Oh! heaven will furnish you with means to effect so good and chivalrous an aim!" ejaculated Lucreza, still supporting herself on Otto's arm. "You have inspired me with hope—you have imparted joy to my soul! Let me call you friend—brother; for you possess a heart—a generosity of disposition—which places you upon a level with the proudest princes of the earth. Yes—I must call you friend and brother, Otto—dear Otto!"

Lucreza's head sank upon the breast of the young artist, and she seemed to weep—for low sobs met his ears. "Compose yourself, lady," he said, his generous heart profoundly touched by what he conceived to be a natural ebullition of a woman's emotion: "compose—calm yourself, lady—I implore you. Show me the means by which I can serve your Highness—and command me as one devoted to your cause."

"Ah! how can I ever repay this noble conduct on your part?" murmured Lucreza; then, raising her head, from which she had dexterously removed the veil while affecting that burst of mingled anguish and gratitude on Otto's breast, she revealed to him a countenance whose melancholy softness of expression gave an ineffable charm to its marvellous beauty.

Full upon that face streamed the silver moonlight—its rays reflected in the deep blue eyes, on whose long dark lashes the crystal tears trembled—and that same lustre playing as a glory upon the shining masses of the lady's golden hair.

The young artist suddenly found himself exposed to the influence of a countenance whose loveliness was calculated to touch a heart of stone:—a charming woman was hanging on his arm, with what appeared to him to be the confidence which a sister may repose in a brother;—a minute before, that beauteous face was pillowed on his breast—and now it was raised so close to his own that her pure breath fanned his cheeks.

For an instant—a single instant—did Otto feel himself prompted by an irresistible passion to clasp that lovely woman in his arms, and cover her brow—her cheeks—her lips with kisses.

But, suddenly exercising a marvellous and almost superhuman control over his feelings, and breathing to himself the name of Nina—as if the image with which that name was associated were possessed of influence sufficient to strengthen his good resolves—Otto Pianalla gently disengaged himself from the half-embrace in which Lucreza Borgia retained him.

"Show me how I can serve your Highness," he again said; "and you will find me no vain braggart, who promises much, and shrinks from performing anything."

"We shall meet again to-morrow," returned Lucreza, somewhat haughtily; then, in a more conciliatory tone, she added, "I shall walk in the picture gallery at eleven o'clock. May I hope to see you there, and at that hour?"

"Have I not said that your Highness may command me?" observed Otto, in a deferential manner.

"Adieu, then, for the present, Otto—for you must permit me to consider you in the light of a brother," and she offered him her hand.

As a matter of respectful courtesy, Otto raised it to his lips.

Lucreza pressed his hand gently ere she withdrew her own; and, replacing her veil, retreated quickly from the spot.

"He was proof against my first attack," murmured Lucreza Borgia to herself, as she hurried along the rampart; "and for a moment I felt offended with him. But I was wrong to vex myself—I was wrong to permit even so evanescent a chagrin to inspire me! To-morrow he shall yield—he shall yield, with all his virtue!"

## CHAPTER LXIX.

### THE TEMPTATIONS OF OTTO PIANALLA.

THE young artist retired at an early hour to the apartment allotted to him in Rosenthal Castle.

He was wearied of the adventures of that bustling day, and soon sought his couch.

But sleep did not immediately visit him.

The interview with Lucreza Borgia was uppermost in his thoughts. There appeared to him something strange in the anxiety which she had evinced to secure his services on behalf of her brother, considering that he was a humble individual, without followers to fight at his command—without gold to gain over the gaolers of the Prince—without, in a word, any apparent means of rendering available those services which she had claimed and which he had promised.

She did not appear to have formed any settled plan

wherein he could become an active and efficient agent; and yet the task to be accomplished was something more than simple child's play. The Prince was supposed to be a prisoner in a strong and well-defended fortress,—a captive in the power of a noble whose watchfulness was beyond the hope of surprise or the power of baffling.

In what way, then, could he—the humble artist—aid that imprisoned Prince, or restore him to his sister?

Otto's thoughts wandered over all the details of his interview with the Princess,—that Princess with whose name he was unacquainted;—and he could not repress a sensation of uneasiness, almost amounting to a vague suspicion, when he reflected upon the tenderness of her manner towards him.

But his rightly constituted mind would not permit him long to harbour injurious notions relative to anyone without positive evidence to support them; and he banished that germinating suspicion by means of the natural argument that the Princess had been overwhelmed by feelings of mingled sorrow and gratitude—sorrow for the captivity of her brother, and gratitude towards himself for the readiness with which he had consented to yield her his services.

He thus tranquillized himself after a long meditation, and then fell asleep.

It was now midnight; and a strange and superhuman scene occurred in his chamber.

Scarcely were Otto Pianalla's eyes closed in slumber, when the Demon suddenly appeared in the room.

His countenance wore an expression of malignant triumph, as if some fell deed which he meditated were already accomplished. Folding his arms across his chest, and advancing towards the bed whereon the artist slept, he murmured in a low, but deep-toned voice, the following incantation:—

"Now let voluptuous visions rise  
Before the sleeper's mental eyes;  
Let fragrant zephyrs round him breathe,  
And flow'rets in his pathway wreath;  
Let the soft moonlight's silver ray  
With soothing influence round him play  
While in the grove the nightingale  
Warbles an amatory tale:—  
Let the path lead to where the flowers  
And creeping jasmine wreath in bowers  
There slowly let the mellowed light  
Of myriad lamps dawn on his sight:  
And be that golden lustre shed  
Upon a table richly spread:—  
Now, in enchantment's own retreat,  
Let him sink on the cushioned seat:  
From wine-crowned goblets may his lip  
The rich Burgundian nectar sip;  
And now let music to his ear  
Waft the sounds of every sphere!"

We must detail the gradual effects of this incantation.

Otto Pianalla was suddenly snatched into the world of dreams. He fancied that he found himself roving in a delicious garden, without knowing how or when he was transported thither. The air was soft and balmy, and fragrant with the perfume of flowers, that margined the pathway along which he was proceeding. It seemed to be the hour of moonlight; and the lustre of that planet was not coldly bright, but warm and genial, producing a species of voluptuous languor, which inspired his soul with an ineffable tenderness. This feeling, too, was enhanced by the warbling of the nightingales, whose notes appeared to breathe love and passion in dulcet and witching strains. As he proceeded along the path, the shrubs became higher and thicker, though all bearing flowers of beautiful appearance and most ravishing perfume. By degrees the foliage arched above his head; and he soon found himself roving in a long covered avenue, completely formed with festooning garlands, green boughs, and creeping plants. Still the moonlight streamed through the verdant arch which was variegated with the thousand hues of the flowers; and that lustre, soft, tender, and melting, rendered all objects completely visible. By slow degrees another species of light—more mellow and golden—appeared to mingle with, or rather break upon, that of the moon; and Otto then perceived that the boughs were hung with innumerable lamps, all of which were slowly shedding forth a yellow lustre which ineffably enhanced that voluptuous languor which had before stolen upon him. The strength of this lustre insensibly increased—superseding that of the moon—and gradually growing more brilliant until it acquired an effulgence such as Otto had never before beheld. Still it

did not dazzle his eyes unpleasantly, nor absorb the delicious fragrance of the air. But it set off the bright hues of the flowers in a manner to produce the effect of the most extraordinary mosaic work that could possibly be conceived. Otto's feelings were those of ravishment and ecstatic delight. He seemed to be wandering in some fairy scene redolent of pleasure and indescribable bliss. Slowly he walked on, until he reached an arbour, where a table was spread in the most tasteful manner with all species of delicious fruits, confectionery, conserves, and wines. The vases, the salvers, and dishes were all of glittering crystal; and the goblets were of gold, set round with brilliants. The reflection of the light from this richly-spread table was productive of an effect harmonious and grand. Yielding to the voluptuous languor which influenced without depressing him, he sank upon the soft cushions of an ottoman of rich velvet, and filling a goblet of the red wine which shone so bright through the crystal vases that contained it, conveyed the nectar to his lips. He drank; and at that moment a choir of melodious voices, belonging to women who were unseen, but whom imagination pictured of the most ravishing beauty, warbled the following lines:—

“Welcome to the realms of fairy and of fay,  
Tarry, gentle stranger—oh! tarry until day!  
Earth shall yield its produce, the choicest and the best—

And Beauty lend her smiles to make thee fully blest.

Here no cares perplex:

Here no sorrows vex.

Love and Pleasure jointly reign

O'er the happy fairy train.

Theirs is not a despot sway:—

Tarry, stranger, until day!

“Thou shalt be crown'd with the rose and the vine,  
Thy lips shall be moist with kisses and wine,  
O darling of Love and of Pleasure!  
Sweet music shall shed its soft influence o'er thee,  
And a troop of fair maidens dance lightly before thee  
In gay and voluptuous measure.

Then tarry awhile,

And Beauty shall smile

Upon thee, Love's favourite guest!

On the leaves of the rose

Thy limbs shall repose,

And melody lull thee to rest!”

These strains appeared, in Otto's vision, to augment that voluptuous languor which had previously overtaken him; and he seemed to fall back in raptures upon the luxurious ottoman.

Then the Demon chanted another incantation:—

“Now let Lucreza's image seem  
To seek the sleeper in his dream!  
Let her bright eyes break on his trance  
With tender and impassioned glance;  
Her lips breathe love in softest tone;  
Her warm hand gently press his own;  
Her moist red mouth proffer the bliss  
Of the prolonged ecstatic kiss;

And let her silken hair wave on his cheek:—

May she be strong to tempt, and he to yield be weak!”

The effects of this incantation were immediately felt by Otto Pianalla. He fancied—still labouring under the influence of the vision—that, as he lay upon the ottoman in the lamp-lit arbour of flowers, a female form glided gently towards him; and he immediately recognised the Princess. She glanced upon him with eyes full of passion; her lips murmured the enraptured language of love; she took his hand in her own, and gently pressed it; she approached her face towards his, as if to invite the kiss which she seemed to crave; and her shining, silken hair touched his cheek.

But at that moment he seemed endowed with a sudden and determined courage:—he drew back ere his lips touched hers; he made the sign of the cross—and the entire vision instantly disappeared.

It had, however, lasted several hours;—for, starting up in his bed to assure himself that all he had seen and experienced was nothing but a dream, the light of the morning sun streamed through the casement full upon his countenance.

## CHAPTER LXX.

### OTTO'S SECOND INTERVIEW WITH LUCREZA.

“It is a vision,” said Otto; “and yet how strange a vision! Methinks that a portion of the voluptuous

languor, which I experienced in the dream, yet influences me: the pressure of that lady's hand still seems to be felt by mine; and scarcely a minute has elapsed since her silken hair touched my cheek. But it was all a dream—a baseless dream; and I thank God that it was so. Surely some evil spirit sought to tempt me—surely some inauspicious genius endeavoured to excite impure thoughts in my soul by means of that voluptuous scenery, and by aid of the image of that Princess to whose service I have pledged myself! But those baleful influences have little effect upon a soul whose trust is in God. I will now pray—pray fervently that any evil impression which that dream has left on my mind may be removed by His illimitable goodness.”

Otto Pianalla then sank upon his knees by the side of the bed, and poured forth his soul to that Deity whose devoted servitor he was.

At eleven o'clock he repaired to the picture gallery of the Castle,—a long passage hung with the portraits of many of the Baron's ancestors. There, in massive frames, were the likenesses of grim warriors and of ladies remarkable for the singularity of their costumes. Between the pictures were various specimens of armour suspended to the walls,—helmets, shields, corselets, cuishes, gauntlets, lances, swords, and battle-axes. Upon pedestals, at long intervals, stood complete suits of armour, propped up internally, and arranged in different attitudes, with the vizors closed, so that they appeared to be formidable warriors armed cap-à-pie, and stationed there to protect the family portraits of Rosenthal.

By the time that Otto Pianalla entered the gallery the effects of his voluptuous dream had altogether subsided. His imagination was naturally too pure to cherish the impressions which the Demon had striven to fix upon it; and though in his slumber he was unable to protect himself against the influence of the vision, yet when he was awake and had full command over his thoughts, he strenuously resisted—nay, indignantly repelled the demoralizing ideas and inclinations which such a dream was so well calculated to inspire.

Strong in his conviction that he should be enabled to meet the Princess without permitting an impure thought to enter his mind,—although in the vision their contact had been so close, and her fascinations had assumed so witching a power,—Otto maintained a calm and unruffled countenance as he saw her approach.

Her veil was raised; and all the splendour of her beauty once more dawned upon his sight.

He saluted her in a respectful manner; and she advanced to meet him with a smiling face.

“You are punctual, Messer Pianalla,” she said, extending towards him her hand, which he raised to his lips, but touched it with them as lightly as the wing of the butterfly sweeps over the rose in the garden:—“you are punctual; and that is a proof of your sincerity—of your readiness to serve me.”

“Has your Highness devised any plan which my humble means may carry out, and which may lead to the release of the Prince, your brother?” asked Otto; “for I must candidly admit that I am totally at a loss to perceive how my single arm will avail against a fortress well guarded, or benefit a prisoner who is doubtless constantly watched.”

“Force in such a case is out of the question,” returned Lucreza; “but cunning and skill may effect much. The brave man who conceived the means of emancipating the Baron of Czernin from the convent in the Julian Alps,—a feat which you performed, and which has reached my ears,—will not be at a loss to devise a project that may enable him to communicate with the Prince, my brother.”

“If by merely establishing a method of correspondence with his Highness, his release would follow,” began Otto.

“It would—it would!” interrupted Lucreza hastily. “Were you only able to convey to him this packet,” she continued, showing him at the same time a small parcel not more than an inch square, and enveloped in a piece of parchment carefully secured with a silken cord,—“it would beyond all doubt lead to his liberation.”

“Give me that packet, lady,” said Otto; “and trust to me to deliver it into your brother's hands—or perish in the attempt.”

Lucreza tendered him the small parcel; and as he received it she cast upon him a look of such melting, languishing tenderness that it recalled to his mind the blandishments which she had seemed to practise towards him in his vision.

That very reminiscence made his manner the more cold and his bow the more formal as he received the packet.



Lucreza bit her lip with momentary vexation.

"Pardon me, your Highness," said Otto, mechanically weighing the parcel in his hand,—"pardon me if I ask whether you are well assured that so light and apparently unimportant a packet as this can be in any way adapted to aid your brother's emancipation? I do not seek to learn its contents—I am impelled by no impertinent curiosity; but, as there is a life to venture in the enterprise, it would be the more satisfactory for me to know that your Highness has not miscalculated the probable effects of the means which you are employing to release the Prince."

"Oh! those means never fail in their object," said Lucreza, with a smile of strange significance. "Forgive me, Messer Pianalla, if I do not explain myself on that head more fully," she added, in a rapid tone; "but when I assure you that a family secret is involved—a secret of the deepest import—"

"Your Highness need say no more," interrupted Otto, in a respectful manner. "It is sufficient for me, illustrious lady, that you are yourself convinced of the propriety and efficacy of the step which you are now adopting to accomplish a particular end. It remains for me to convey this packet to your brother; and I repeat the assurance that I will either succeed or become a victim to the fury of Count Manfred of Linsdorf."

"Noble-hearted youth!" exclaimed Lucreza; "you know not whom you are serving;—but, exiled and powerless though we now are, the time may come when my brother and myself shall have the means of substantially testifying our gratitude."

"I seek no such reward, lady," answered Otto; "for should I be fortunate enough to accomplish the object which I have undertaken, the consciousness of having been the means of restoring two fond relatives to each other will prove the sweetest recompense that I could possibly covet or receive."

"But wherefore have you so nobly undertaken this cause—my cause, as I may term it?" asked Lucreza. "You have never seen my brother—you know him not—you can have no friendship for him. You have, however, seen me—you have conversed with me—I have called you my dearest friend—my brother. Oh! do not wound my pride, Otto,—do not destroy the happy illusion—if an illusion it be—which I have nursed for the last few hours,—do not say coldly to me that you have embarked in my service through any other save the most chivalrous motive! And what is the spirit of chivalry? what is the duty of a true knight, Otto? I need not explain all this to you. Yet may I say that when a generous-hearted youth devotes himself to the service of a lady of high degree—when he espouses her cause—he places himself in her silken chains—he becomes bound to do her bidding—he must render himself deserving of her smiles—nay, he must even study to win her heart. And if that lady be one of an equally noble mind, she will not regard the social distinctions of rank which may seem to separate her from her hero; she will reward his services by throwing down those barriers—her gratitude for his devotion will place them upon the level of equality,—and that gratitude must speedily assume the more ardent and impassioned phase of love."

"Your Highness—I can scarcely presume—" began Otto, painfully embarrassed by the language which was now addressed to him.

"Oh! one who is bold and handsome as you, Otto, should dare all—everything," interrupted Lucreza, mistaking the meaning of the phrase which the young artist left unfinished. "Listen to me—listen attentively for a few moments; and I will reveal to you those emotions which now animate my heart. Some time ago I beheld you in Vienna—no matter how or where; and I was struck by your appearance. Months and months have passed since that day;—I have dwelt in another land—I have passed through many exciting scenes, many troubles—I have been thrown from the pinnacle of happiness and power to the condition of an exile;—and yet through all those vicissitudes I have retained your image in my mind—I have cherished it—loved it! Nay—start not, Otto—I implore you to hear me to the end. Yes—I have never ceased to think of you; and you may therefore conceive the sudden joy which I experienced—the emotions of happiness which I felt—when yesterday I met you upon the rampart. We passed each other—as you may remember; but when I was at some distance I turned, and you were gazing after me! Oh! how can I convey to you an idea of that joy—that delicious hope which possessed me when I observed that your eyes had followed me? I can assure you that the proudest princes in Europe have

knelt at my feet—crowned heads have whispered the language of passion in my ears—great warriors have sought to win a smile from me. But never—never, Otto, was my satisfaction so immense—my happiness so great, as when I yesterday beheld you gazing after me on the rampart. I repaired in the evening to the western side of the castle to ponder upon those feelings with which you have inspired me—and we met again! You saluted me, then—and I resolved that we should be better acquainted with each other. I made a remark—you seemed to meet my object half way; and we fell into conversation. I explained to you the sources of my sorrows; and you unhesitatingly volunteered your services in my behalf. I accepted them as gratefully as they were proffered frankly;—and in all that passed between us I saw what I deemed to be a reflection in your heart of that feeling which exists in mine. Oh! if I be wrong, then never will a more delicious dream have been more cruelly dissolved by a stern and adverse reality! But no—it cannot be—it is not so: you do not hate me, Otto—you will not think meanly of me because I have laid bare to you the secrets of my heart—you will not refuse me your friendship, even if you cannot accord me your love!"

"And as she spoke these last words, Lucreza—than whom no serpent was ever more subtle—seized the young artist by the hands, gazed upon him tenderly for a moment, and then sank her head upon his breast.

Firmly—but gently—resolutely—but not rudely, Otto Pianalla disengaged himself from her half-embrace, and leading her to a seat, remained standing before her.

"Oh! lady," he said, "all that you have just uttered has caused me signal pain. I know not how to answer you—how to undeceive you."

"Undeceive me! no—no!" cried Lucreza, clasping her hands together, and affecting the most passionate emotion.

"Pray, lady—I implore you—listen to me in my turn," continued Otto; "for I dare not hesitate in the performance of what now becomes a solemn—an imperative duty. I confess that yesterday afternoon I was indiscreet enough to gaze after you on the rampart; but it is no compliment to you to declare that there is a commanding grace in your form which is calculated to make the most indifferent look upon you longer than on ordinary women. We met again in the evening, lady: and I must now again confess that I did somewhat on my own side encourage that conversation which sprang up between us. But, as the Almighty is my judge! I declare most solemnly that you have misinterpreted my motives;—and on this head I cannot be more explicit. When you acquainted me with the captivity of your brother, I proffered my services through no selfish view—with no ulterior design. There again, your Highness has misunderstood me. Oh! not for one instant did my thoughts assume an arrogance that could prompt them to raise themselves to one so high above me as you, lady;—not for one moment did I entertain an idea that it was in my power to inspire an interest beyond that friendship with which a Princess might choose to honour one who was ready to risk his life in her cause! No—never did my vanity triumph over the proper feelings of my heart!"

"You make me wretched, Otto, with these cold reasonings—these chilling explanations!" exclaimed Lucreza Borgia. "I do not hesitate to declare that I already love—that I feel I can adore you! Will you spurn that affection on my part? will you render me contemptible in my own eyes? Oh! if you now reply in that same freezing manner as ere now—if you do not tell me that you will endeavour to love me in return—you will drive me to despair—to distraction!"

"My God! what can I say? what can I do?" ejaculated Pianalla, bewildered between his own honourable feelings and that well-played ebullition of emotions, the sincerity of which he could not for a moment suspect.

"You ask what you can say—what you can do," exclaimed Lucreza, seizing his hands once more, "when a woman whose mirror has reflected charms of the possession of which she cannot declare her ignorance—when such a woman offers you her heart—her love! Oh! Otto—are you not cold and stern when you compel me thus to fall at your feet?"

And as she spoke, Lucreza threw herself upon her knees before the young artist.

But at the same instant, an object—doubtless disturbed by the suddenness of this movement,—fell from her bosom, where it had been concealed, upon the floor.

Otto's eye caught sight of it—it was a ring with a lion's head!

Lucreza hastily picked it up;—but Otto uttered an ex-

clamation of mingled horror and surprise, and fell back several paces.

"Messer Pianalla!" cried the Princess, starting from her suppliant posture.

"Oh! now I know you—I know you well!" ejaculated Otto, unable to repress a movement of ineffable disgust. "Rumour has bruited your crimes all over the world, and has not forgotten to explain the means by which those crimes were perpetrated. Holy Virgin! is it possible that I have pledged myself to Lucreza Borgia to effect the release of her brother Caesar?"

"You have, Messer Pianalla—and you dare not, as a true man, fly from your word!" answered the Princess, her lustful affection for the young artist now changing into bitter hatred, when she saw the feelings of abhorrence with which he regarded her.

"Nor will I fly from my pledge—although it may tend to liberate a fiend amongst the human race!" exclaimed Otto, proudly. "I was in Vienna, lady, when the report of the fall of the Borgias reached that city; and the same rumour which conveyed to my ears the tale, told also how the Orsini had sacked your brother's palace, and how they had therein discovered the proofs of those dread crimes which had previously been involved in doubt and uncertainty. Then, too, did the Baron of Czernin receive a clue to the elucidation of those mysteries which he had beheld in a certain palace at Venice, and his acquaintance with which was no doubt the principal cause of his long imprisonment. The properties of that ring, which has just betrayed you to me, are now no longer a secret—all the horrible mysteries of the Borgias are well known!"

"And were I permitted to live all my past years over again," said Lucreza, with a scornful smile, "I would not spare a single one of all my victims—I would pursue the same career!"

"Unhappy woman!" exclaimed Otto; "why dost thou not think of prayer and repentance, instead of such terrible vaunts as those? How much hast thou to answer for?"

"But thou hast not to answer for me, young man," returned Lucreza: "therefore spare thy reproaches. And now let me separate—since farther parley is useless. Thou wilt do my bidding—thou art pledged to my service!"

"I will endeavour to liberate your brother," answered Otto; "but I will not be the bearer to him of a packet which may contain poison."

And he tendered the small parcel to Lucreza.

"You pledged yourself to convey that packet to my brother," said Lucreza, calmly.

"And I will rather break my pledge than be the instrument which is to supply the Duke of Valentino with the means of committing murder," replied Otto.

"Perjured youth! you now shrink from the performance of your promises," said Lucreza, contemptuously, as she received the parcel from his hand—that hand which she no longer sought to press tenderly.

"No: your Highness wrongs me," answered Pianalla. "I will redeem my pledge—or perish in the attempt;—but if I succeed, it will be by means of which I shall not be ashamed."

Otto then turned abruptly away from the enraged and disappointed Lucreza.

## CHAPTER LXXI.

### THE MOTHER'S GRAVE.—THE DISGUISE.

WHEN Otto Pianalla left the picture-gallery, he repaired direct to the castle-gate, and, crossing the draw-bridge, took the road leading towards Wittenberg.

Having pursued the path for about half a mile, he reached a cemetery which stood on the right-hand side, and which was surrounded by cypresses, poplars, and yews.

A neat little cottage served as the sexton's lodge at the iron gate of the enclosure; and at the opposite extremity was a small chapel, whose simple but appropriate architecture, latticed belfry, and white walls completed the picturesque appearance of the scene.

The moment Otto appeared at the gate, the sexton came forth from his lodge, and gave him admittance into the cemetery.

The young man proceeded direct to a remote corner, and threw himself on his knees by the side of a grave which was marked by a simple cross of wood.

"Sainted spirit of my dearest mother," he exclaimed, aloud, joining his hands and raising his eyes to heaven, "I have come back to the spot where thine ashes repose,—come back to implore thy blessing! When last I prayed over this cold sod, I was houseless—friendless—starving!

All seemed dark before me: not a hope illumined my path! And yet I vowed never to deviate from the right way—never to yield to temptation, nor to tarnish the honourable though humble name I bear. And I invoked thine aid, my mother! to keep me in that course! Nor hast thou been deaf to my prayer. Thou and other good angels have protected me; and the Almighty has blessed me on thine account! Here—here, by thy grave, my mother! can I lay my hand upon my heart and truly say that I have never wronged a living soul by word or deed. And this I proclaim not boastfully—but to prove that I am worthy of thy continued protection! And, oh! let me not forget to pray for the soul of my lamented sister Ida!"

Then the young artist bowed his head upon his breast and prayed long—silently—and fervently.

His was not the gross superstition of the bigot: it was a manly, pure, and generous worship which a rational mind offered up to that all-seeing Power whose existence and whose omnipotence are proclaimed by countless tongues throughout the universe.

Having poured forth his soul in that solemn manner over the grave of his mother, Otto Pianalla rose, and returned to the sexton's lodge.

"My good friend," he said to the man, "when I consigned the remains of my beloved parent to the cold earth, I was too poor to place a stone above her grave. My position has somewhat altered; and I am now enabled to perform that sacred duty. Here is gold: see that my wishes in this respect be accomplished; and the holy chaplain will furnish thee with the inscription that I would have placed upon the stone."

The sexton received the money, and promised that the pious aim of the young man should be carried into effect without delay. Otto then left the cemetery and proceeded to the dwelling of the priest who had spiritual charge of the burial-ground.

He was an old man with snow-white hair, and was beloved by all the inhabitants of that rural district for his piety, his charity, and his stainless life. He had known Otto from childhood, and was pleased to behold the young artist again. They sat down to a frugal repast, which was served upon a little table placed at the door of the priest's humble but comfortable dwelling, and protected from the scorching rays of the afternoon sun by the creeping jasmine which shaded the portico.

Otto made known to his venerable friend the instructions which he had previously given to the sexton; and the priest kindly promised to compose a suitable Latin epitaph to be inscribed upon the stone that was to mark the grave of Otto's mother.

Before he took his leave of the holy man, Pianalla placed in his hand a sum of money to be devoted to purposes of charity; and the good priest willingly undertook to be his almoner.

"How few there are," he said, as he wrung the artist's hand at parting,—"how few there are who derive from the periods of their poverty useful lessons to render them wise, charitable, and thoughtful for others, in the days of their prosperity. You are a good youth—and heaven will not fail to prosper you."

He then gave Otto his blessing, and the young man, having taken leave of the venerable priest, pursued his way to Wittenberg.

There he spent two or three hours in visiting those who had been the companions of his childhood, and who were deserving of his remembrance. To some few, who were not prosperous in a worldly point of view, he gave assistance so far as his means would permit; and by all was he received with a cordial welcome—for none had forgotten his goodness of heart and his generous disposition.

When it was dusk, Otto proceeded to put into execution a certain project which he had formed. He began by making a variety of purchases at different shops: namely, a long silken cord, not thicker than the little finger, but strong enough to bear a heavy weight—several small files—a chemical composition made of the decoction of certain berries—and a complete suit of Oriental attire.

He then repaired, with these articles, to the house of a friend, whom he could trust, and to whom he communicated his design. This friend endeavoured to dissuade him from so dangerous a project.

"No," replied Otto: "I am pledged to two persons, in this respect; and I dare not forfeit my word. My benefactor, who first gave me the means of relieving myself from the pressure of poverty, obtained from me a promise that I would proffer my services to a certain lady; and I obeyed him. The task which that lady has imposed upon me is a difficult one; but I do not shrink from it. Attempt not to move me from my purpose."

The friend remained silent; and Otto commenced his preparations.

He undressed himself, and twined the silken cord around his body. He next washed his face, neck, and hands, with the chemical composition; and the skin on those parts almost immediately became tinged with a dark olive hue. He then attired himself in the Oriental garb, and concealed the files about his person.

His disguise was now complete—so complete that when he left the chamber where he had performed his singular toilet, and returned to the room where his friend was sitting, the latter started in dismay.

Otto burst into a joyous laugh, and felt convinced that he should be enabled to deceive the eyes of even the wary Father Anselm, whom he knew (from the dying words of Fritz) to be at Linsdorf Castle.

He then addressed his friend in the following manner:—

"I shall leave you my purse and this packet. If I do not return to you in seven days from this date you may surmise the worst—either that I am no more, or that I languish in a dungeon. The gold shall then be yours—but upon this condition, that you forthwith undertake a journey to Vienna and deliver that packet into the hands of the Archduchess Maria."

The friend faithfully promised to obey these instructions; and Otto knew that he could trust him.

He then sat down and wrote two letters—one to the Baron of Czernin, and the other to Nina Mazzini; but the latter he enclosed in the epistle addressed to the Baron.

"Should you be compelled to undertake that journey to the capital," continued Pianalla, "there are yet other commissions which I entrust to your friendship. The first is to deliver this letter to the Baron of Czernin, whose mansion you will have no difficulty to find. That letter contains one to an amiable girl, whom—But of that no matter," added Otto, hastily, as he brushed away a tear: "should I perish, the Baron will see that the note be duly forwarded to her in Italy, whither she has returned with her father."

These last words were rather spoken in a musing tone to himself than for the information of his friend.

"The last commission which I have to entrust to you is this," he continued, after a short pause: "should I not re-appear ere seven days have elapsed, before you set out for Vienna you must visit Rosenthal Castle, and ask for an interview with the Princess, who is an inmate there. It is unnecessary to mention to you her name; as I discovered it only by an accident, and—bad though she be—do not deem myself justified in revealing it even to a friend. But you will say to her, '*Otto Pianalla has kept his word: he has risked his life to effect the liberation of your brother; and he has either lost that life in the attempt, or is dragging it out in a dungeon.*'—I have no more to ask of your kindness."

The friend promised to execute the commissions thus entrusted to him, and again endeavoured to dissuade Otto from his perilous undertaking.

But the young artist was determined; and, having embraced his friend, set out late at night on his weary walk towards Linsdorf Castle.

## CHAPTER LXXII.

### THE MUTE.

It was about seven o'clock on the following morning, and Father Anselm was closeted with the Lord of Linsdorf.

"Yes," said Anselm; "that corpse which was brought hither by my directions the day before yesterday, was all that remained of him who was once your servitor—Hugo!"

"And how met he that violent death?" asked the Count; "for as yet we have had no leisure to discourse upon that matter."

"There is a young man whom the Vehm has adjudged to the extreme penalty of the Cord and Dagger," answered Father Anselm. "This Otto Pianalla—"

"I have heard of him," interrupted the Count; "he was long a resident in this neighbourhood; and his sister was, if I mistake not, an attendant on the daughter of the Baron of Rosenthal."

"True," replied Anselm. "But of that no matter. It was this same Otto Pianalla who was adjudged to death; and chance brought him to the Black Swan when I was there. I deputed Hugo—who has borne the name of Fritz for many years—to execute on him the sentence of the Vehm. Fritz was then to join me here. But the hours passed—he came not; and I grew alarmed. While one party of your dependants repaired to the Black Swan to arrest Cæsar Borgia and his follower Michelotto, I set

out with another small band of your retainers in search of Fritz. We found him:—but he was no more! He was buried beneath a heap of boughs; and his dagger, which lay near him, was unstained with blood. Doubtless, then, Otto has escaped: the justice of the Vehm will, however, yet overtake him. When the corpse of my faithful Fritz was last night consigned to the grave beneath the lime-trees at the entrance of the forest, I swore to avenge his death with my own hand, should chance ever throw Pianalla into my power. For I also have grave motives of hatred for that young man. But enough of this topic. My object in the interview with you now, is to continue the discussion of that subject whereon we entered yesterday."

"Kinis—Anselm, I mean," said the nobleman, his usually pale cheeks becoming absolutely cadaverous and livid through painful emotions, "I am in your power: but use that power leniently. And, after all," he added, somewhat more confidently, "there will be no advantage to either in a rupture between us; for we each possess the other's secret. Were you to blazon forth the truth relative to that exalted lady, not for a moment should I hesitate to proclaim that you, now known as Father Anselm—"

"Silence!" cried the priest, imperiously. "Let us understand each other. On your part—"

At this moment one of the Count's retainers entered the apartment.

"Well—what is the cause of this intrusion?" demanded the nobleman, impatiently.

"Please your lordship," said the man, "here is a strange youth at the gate, who seems sadly wayworn and wearied, and who makes signs that neither I nor any of my comrades can understand."

"Has he no tongue? can he not speak his will or his wish?" demanded the Count.

"He is unable to utter a word, my lord; and even were he possessed of the power of speech, methinks it would but little avail him; for he is not a German;—I doubt even whether he is a Christian."

"Let food be given to him, and bid him go his ways," said the Count.

"Food has been already set before him, and he ate voraciously," replied the man; "but he seems anxious to remain where he is—so far as I can understand his signs. Doubtless he is some poor heathen creature, who has been abandoned or lost by his master, and knows not what course to pursue."

"Let me see him, my lord," said Anselm; "I have my reasons, which I will explain anon."

"The holy father recommends that he be admitted to our presence," exclaimed the Count.

The retainer, to whom these words were addressed, bowed and withdrew.

In a few minutes he returned, ushering in Otto Pianalla.

Although the young man thus suddenly found himself in the presence of the terrible Count of Linsdorf and the more formidable Father Anselm, he did not betoken any embarrassment of manner, but saluted them in the Oriental style, and remained standing near the door with his hands respectfully crossed over his chest and his head bowed forward.

Indeed, he had gleaned so much of Eastern habits and customs from the Baron of Czernin, that he was well able to sustain the part which he had undertaken to enact.

"Approach, young man," said the Count.

Otto raised his head, and made signs that he could neither understand the words addressed to him, nor speak himself.

"Poor wretch! he is dumb," observed the Count; "I am well aware that the easterns are fond of having mutes in their households."

"Perhaps he can write," said Father Anselm, fixing his keen dark eyes upon Otto; then pointing to writing materials which were spread upon the table, he motioned the young man to use them.

But Otto shook his head in a mournful manner.

"He has doubtless been a mute from his birth," said the Count.

"No," answered Anselm; "a person born dumb must also be deaf—at least, I know no rule to the contrary. But he evidently possesses the faculty of hearing. Illness, or an accident, may have made him dumb in his infancy. It is impossible to glean anything from him; but he may serve our purpose in one particular manner."

"How so?" inquired the Count.

Anselm motioned the dependant, who had introduced Otto, to withdraw.

"I will explain myself," continued Anselm, as soon as

the man had left the room. "I purposely separated Michelotto from his master Cæsar, because I am well aware that two such heads put together would not be long ere they devised some project of escape—well guarded as they are; for you yourself have informed me how even a female once contrived to free herself from your power, without leaving a trace to indicate the mode by which she left the castle."

"Yes—she who is now Countess of Aurana," remarked Manfred, with a malignant scowl, as the circumstances of his baffled schemes with regard to her were thus recalled to his mind.

"Bribery—heavy bribery could have alone enabled her thus to escape," continued Anselm. "My lord, your retainers are not incorruptible. Remember, also, how the young Archduke was permitted to slip from the noose that you had prepared for him."

"The two cases certainly wear a suspicious aspect, holy father," said the Count, struck by the inferences which Anselm so naturally drew from the mysterious circumstances attending the escape alike of Theresa and the Archduke; "and they both occurred about the same time."

"Again, then, I say that your lordship's retainers are not proof against corruption," proceeded Father Anselm; "and if that be the fact—as I cannot hesitate to believe—there breathes not a man who will sooner turn their avarice to his own account than the Duke of Valentinois."

"Then what would you propose?" demanded the Count, unable to comprehend the point towards which the priest was aiming.

"The fidelity of Eastern mutes is proverbial," replied Anselm:—and, oh! how the words thrilled through the heart of Otto, who could scarcely restrain an indication of joy as they met his ears; for they not only convinced him that his disguise had indeed baffled the astute priest, but proved how essentially fortune was favouring his projects.

"True!" ejaculated the Count. "That youth seems to be friendless—houseless—lost: I will take him into my service. By the Virgin! a mute will be a useful appendage!"

"Would that mutes were less rare in this country!" said Anselm: "such men as you and I," he added, significantly, "might find them highly serviceable—for they can act, and yet tell no tales. But in reference to this dumb creature, my proposal is that he be appointed to watch the Prince; and I have heard enough of Oriental mutes to be well aware that they have eyes sharp as needles, and minds cunning as serpents. I am much mistaken, or we shall find this heathen,—for a heathen he no doubt is, even if he have any creed at all,—most zealous in our service. Stay—I will endeavour to make him comprehend our intentions by signs."

Father Anselm now approached so close to Otto Pianalla, that the latter trembled lest he should be detected; but he did not betray his emotions,—assuring himself with the idea that the priest could not be very familiar with his countenance, as the only time they had been face to face was on the night when they had encountered each other at the convent in the Julian Alps.

Nor did Father Anselm recognise him—although he had in reality seen Otto oftener than the latter suspected; for the priest had beheld him in Vienna at the time of Gregory Walstein's trial,—and again, a few days previously, at the Black Swan.

But so admirable was Otto's disguise, so natural in appearance was his artificial complexion, and such a change did it impart to the expression of his countenance, that Anselm had not the remotest suspicion with regard to him.

The priest now began to make a variety of signs with a view to express the readiness of the Count to take him into his service, if he would behave faithfully. It may be supposed that Pianalla was not very dull in comprehending these intimations; and he could scarcely suppress a smile when Anselm turned towards Lord Manfred, observing, "He positively seems to be very quick and intelligent."

"Mutes must necessarily be adepts in understanding signs," answered the Count; "since they have no other language. I think this poor creature will serve us well, for he strives to express, by a variety of signals, his deep gratitude for the kindness shown him."

"I will now conduct him to the rooms occupied by the Duke of Valentinois," said Anselm; and he beckoned Otto to follow him.

But first the young artist approached the Count of Linsdorf, knelt at his feet, and taking one of the nobleman's hands, touched it gently with his lips.

Painful as this ceremony was to his feelings, he was compelled to adopt all possible precautions, and call to his aid all factitious means to inspire confidence in the reality of the character which he was playing.

The Count seemed well pleased with this respectful demonstration of gratitude; and, unbending from his natural sternness of demeanour, smiled almost kindly upon the supposed mute.

Pianalla rose and followed Father Anselm from the room.

The latter led the way down the wide staircase, and issued from that building in which the Count's apartments were situate. He crossed the spacious courtyard, and opened a low door at the foot of one of the towers of the keep, or donjon. He then ascended a winding staircase, still followed by Otto. They at length reached a landing, where a sentinel was posted. Anselm took a key from beneath his garments, and with it opened an arched door which was set in a Gothic recess. He then proceeded through three rooms, all the doors of which were carefully locked, but with the keys of which he was provided. Beyond those rooms was a smaller one, fitted up as an oratory.

But the moment they entered this apartment, Otto started, as his eyes encountered a picture of a beautiful woman, whose face instantaneously struck him as being marvellously like that of the Archduchess Maria.

Fortunately he was behind Father Anselm, who might otherwise have perceived the effect produced by the picture, and thereby have had his suspicions excited.

The priest now touched a spring in the wainscot, and a secret door flew open, revealing a passage some twenty feet long, and lighted by loopholes. At the end was a huge door, quite new,—seeming, as was indeed the case, as if it had only been fitted there within a few days.

Ere he withdrew the massive bolt which fastened this door, Anselm took a long, sharp dagger from beneath his garments.

He then opened the door, and beckoned Otto to follow him.

The young artist now found himself in a very small chamber, the windows of which were not only protected with massive bars of iron, but also shaded by a large contrivance of woodwork, which, projecting outward, allowed the eye to catch a glimpse of the blue arch above, but totally impeded the view of any object either on the same level as the casement or beneath it.

The room was tolerably well furnished; and at a table, mournfully supporting his head upon his hands, sate a person whom Otto immediately concluded to be Cæsar Borgia.

He seemed to be a little past the age of thirty: his hair was black—his complexion pale—his beard auburn;—and on his forehead was the mark of the severe wound which he had received from Gregory Walstein.

The moment Anselm and Otto entered the little room, which indeed wore the semblance of a prison, the Duke started from his chair, and, drawing his tall form up to its full height, surveyed the visitors with mingled defiance and suspicion.

"You do well to carry that dagger, detestable son of the gibbet!" he cried, darting a furious glance upon Anselm; "for—by the Virgin!—I—I—"

"Your lordship's taunts and threats are alike useless now," interrupted the priest, calmly. "You are in my power; and in my power shall you remain until you purchase your freedom with a princely ransom."

"The Lord of Rosenthal will yet deliver me, insolent menial!" cried the Duke; "in spite of your foul aspersions upon the chivalrous honour of that nobleman."

"Vainly do you cling to that belief," returned Anselm. "The Baron has sent to demand you at the hands of the Count of Linsdorf; and the Count has declared in reply that he is astounded at the requisition, since he knows nothing of your Highness nor your concerns. But all discourse on this head is unnecessary. A hundred thousand crowns will purchase your ransom; and he who was once the master of all Italy, cannot be at a loss for such a sum."

"Give freedom to my faithful dependant Michelotto," cried the Duke; "and I will despatch him to Vienna, to beseech that amount at the hands of the Emperor."

"And instead of returning with the crowns, he would perhaps come back with an army," said the priest, contemptuously. "No, my lord; I am not to be thus duped. You have concealed treasures somewhere—you must have: and your liberty can only be purchased by the revelation of that secret."

"By the Virgin!" exclaimed the Duke, enraged by the

priest's words and manner, "I left Italy with scarcely sufficient for the expenses of my journey. How, then, thinkest thou—"

"Enough, my lord," interrupted Anselm: "you will shortly become more reasonable. In the meantime, I have brought you a companion—this mute—"

"A mute?" repeated Caesar, glancing suspiciously at Otto, who kept his eyes upon the ground, as if unconscious what was passing in his presence.

"Yes, my lord—a mute," answered Anselm, smiling vindictively: "one who has studied, in eastern climates, the duties of a spy. I leave him with your Highness: he will doubtless prove an efficient valet, though a sorry companion."

With these words, Father Anselm retreated rapidly from the chamber; and closed the door upon its two inmates. Then came the din of the heavy bolt, shooting into its socket; and this was followed by the retiring steps of the priest along the paved passage.

At length all became silent; and Otto was alone with the once formidable Caesar Borgia.

### CHAPTER LXXIII.

#### OTTO PIANALLA AND CAESAR BORGIA.

"THE miscreant!" ejaculated the Duke of Valentinois, when Anselm had left the room: "Oh! for the means of vengeance—oh! for the chance of escape! My God—to be cooped up in this horrible hole, where one can scarcely breathe;—to see but a few feet of the blue sky, and yet to know by its azure hue that the sun is shining brightly:—to languish in this accursed den, when the whole world has scarcely scope enough for the ambition of the Borgias! It is terrible—terrible! Oh! for the means of escape! And now to have this mute given me as a companion—as a spy! They wish to drive me mad!"

And Caesar Borgia struck his forehead violently with his open palm.

"My lord!" breathed a voice close by him;—he turned—it was the supposed mute who had spoken.

The Duke gazed upon him with mingled surprise and suspicion.

"Fear nothing, my lord," continued the artist, in a low tone: "I am not here to injure you—this disguise is assumed for your sake."

"Who are you, generous young man?" said Caesar, also sinking his voice; "and what brings you hither?"

"My name is Otto Pianalla—"

"Ah! he who delivered the Baron of Czernin from the convent in the Julian Alps?" interrupted Caesar, his countenance again expressing suspicion.

"And as I delivered the Baron of Czernin, so do I undertake to free your Highness," said Otto, steadily returning the glance which the Duke fixed upon him. "Father Anselm has told you only too truly—the Baron of Rosenthal will not draw the hostile brand in your behalf. Powerful though he be, he dreads the secret resources of the Count of Linsdorf, who is a chief of the Bloody League."

"Then is the Lord of Rosenthal a very craven who dares not execute the commands of his sovereign, Maximilian!" exclaimed Borgia. "But, say, young man—hast thou lately visited that Baron's castle?"

"I was there as late as yesterday morning, my lord," was the reply: "and it is in consequence of a promise to your Highness's sister that I have undertaken to attempt your deliverance."

"Ah! then Lucreza has arrived in safety at Rosenthal Castle? Was it to her ingenuity that you are indebted for this admirable disguise which has enabled you to penetrate hither?"

"No, my lord. To speak candidly, I refused to be the bearer of a small packet which she was desirous of conveying to you; and her Highness does not at this moment know the stratagem that I have devised in order to obtain access to you."

"And wherefore did you hesitate to bring me the packet?" demanded Caesar.

"Because, my lord," replied the artist, firmly, "I was suspicious of its contents. And now, ere we discourse on the object which brought me hither, let us understand each other. It is through no admiration of your Highness's character that I have undertaken this perilous venture;—nor have the charms of the Princess allured me to embark on an errand of mere chivalry. No—I come to you, because I pledged myself by a solemn vow to her Highness—ere I knew her name—to effect the deliverance of her brother, or to perish in the attempt. Your lordship now understands my motives."

"You are at least candid, Messer Pianalla," said the Prince, somewhat haughtily: then, the next moment, he added, with a smile, "but on that account the more trustworthy. How hope you to effect the object of your generous errand?"

"I have keen files and a good coil of silken rope about my person," returned Pianalla.

"Those and resolute minds are all that we need," said the Duke of Valentinois, his pale countenance becoming animated with a flush of hope.

"Moreover," continued Otto, "as I am not regarded with any suspicion, nor can be treated as a prisoner, I shall doubtless be enabled to enjoy at least an hour's freedom each day. In that case, it is my purpose to become acquainted with every point of the fortress, and thus ascertain how your freedom may be consummated."

"I understand you," returned Caesar; "for, granting that I escape from this tower, I should still be a prisoner within the circuit of these walls."

"Precisely so, my lord. As I came ere now through the court-yard, I saw enough to convince me that the castle is well guarded."

"Oh! that traitor Anselm thinks he holds a rich prize!" exclaimed Caesar; "but I declare to you most solemnly that I fled from Italy with only a sufficiency of funds to support the expenses of my journey. Nevertheless, the day will come when I shall be able to reward you."

"I seek no reward—and should accept none," answered Otto.

"You are a strange young man," said Caesar, surveying him with a feeling nearly akin to admiration; for the Duke was too worldly-minded a being to put implicit faith in the existence of pure disinterestedness. "However—we will talk no more on that subject now. I would observe to you that a faithful dependant of mine is also a prisoner here; and it would rue me sore to leave him in jeopardy."

"First escape yourself, my lord—and neither Father Anselm nor the Count of Linsdorf will deem it worth their while to retain your servitor in captivity."

"Well spoken," said the Prince; "and even were it otherwise, I might aid him, myself being free—whereas at present both he and I are powerless. But one word in reference to the author of my present captivity—the traitor Anselm: know you who he really is?"

"I believe him to be a powerful chief of the Vehm-miscalled Holy—"

"Yes—he is a chief of the Vehm," interrupted Caesar; "and he is less or more—as you may take it. Have you ever heard of a certain Ulric Kinis?"

"Who was hanged many years ago at Vienna for treason?" added Pianalla. "I have heard of him; and, moreover, I remember that during the period when the trial of the impostor Gregory Walstein occupied public attention in the capital, there was a strange rumour current that Ulric Kinis had been seen and recognised in the city."

"And that rumour was true," returned Borgia; "for Father Anselm was in Vienna at that time—and Father Anselm is Ulric Kinis!"

"My lord!" cried Otto, astounded by this assertion.

"It is strictly true," continued the Prince. "Did you not hear me ere now stigmatise him as the gibbet's son? But that he deemed you unable to comprehend the German tongue, he would have shrunk from your sight. Yes—he was hanged, but not unto death; and he escaped from the anatomical room on the night following his execution. The information may someday serve you."

"It may," answered Otto; "for Father Anselm seeks my life—and your lordship has placed in my hands a weapon that may haply enable me to combat his infernal designs."

The Duke of Valentinois and Otto Pianalla then sat down to deliberate upon the means of accomplishing the grand aim—an escape. A variety of projects were started and discussed; but they were compelled to abandon all save the one which suggested the execution of their design by means of the window. There were too many doors to break through to venture upon a flight by means of the rooms leading from the prison-chamber; it was, therefore, resolved that the bars of the casement should be filed through, and the escape effected in the depth of a night when utter darkness should favour the venture.

At three o'clock in the afternoon two of the Count's dependants brought in a tray containing ample provision for the Prince's dinner.

They remained in the passage while he partook of the repast, Otto waiting upon him in the capacity of servitor, in order to sustain appearances.



When Caesar had terminated his meal, Otto took his place at the table, and dined also. The two retainers then departed with the tray, closing all the doors carefully behind them.

In the evening, at eight o'clock, supper was served in the same manner; and one of the men who brought it, intimated by signs that Otto was at liberty to leave the prison-chamber for a short time if he felt disposed.

He availed himself of this permission with a joyful heart, although he appeared to treat it with indifference.

When he was in the open air, he walked round the donjon, examining the tower in which he knew the prison-chamber to be situate, calculating the height of that room from the ground, and studying the precise position of the window with the wooden shade.

He then extended his ramble round the castle, and carried his scrutiny to the minutest points in the fortifications and defences. He marked the places where the sentinels were posted, and committed to memory as it were a complete map of the entire stronghold.

And all the time he seemed to be merely wandering about in a listless manner, so as to avert suspicion from his real designs.

No one interfered with him: the persons whom he met surveyed him with curiosity, for they had all heard of the introduction of a "heathen mute" into the castle;—but not a soul treated him with either impertinence or obtrusive attention. Nor was any intimation conveyed to him that he must return to the prison-room at a particular hour:—it was evident that his assumed character was fully believed to be the true one, and that not the least suspicion attached itself to him.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he entered the donjon again; and then the sentinel on the landing at the head of the staircase conducted him to the Prince's room.

Shortly after ten Father Anselm visited the chamber for a moment, to assure himself that his prisoner was safe; and he made a sign of intelligence to Otto, as much as to say, "Watch him closely." The priest then departed, and carried the keys with him to his own apartment.

Otto Pianalla now divested himself of his clothing, produced the files, and uncoiled the rope from around his body. The eyes of Caesar Borgia sparkled with delight as he beheld these proofs of his companion's sincerity; and they were both rejoiced when, upon measurement of the cord, the artist was enabled to compute the full adequacy of its length to all their purposes—there being far more than sufficient to reach the ground from the prison window.

They therefore now fell to work with good heart upon the iron bars. There was a strong cross-bar, horizontally fixed between the sides of the casement, and perforated with holes through which the perpendicular bars passed. It was necessary to remove two of these upright bars—or at least portions of two: the Prince and the artist accordingly determined to file them at the bottom and also just above the horizontal bar—so that when cut through, the lower halves would maintain their upright position until it was requisite to remove them.

The files were good: their sharp teeth ate away the iron at a rapid rate. The filings were carefully collected and disposed of so that no indication of the proceedings might catch the eyes of those who entered the prison-chamber in the day-time.

Before they retired to rest, half of their task in respect to cutting through the bars was completed.

Otto stretched himself to sleep upon a mat close by the threshold of the door; and although he was in reality awake when Father Anselm made his appearance in the morning, he affected to be aroused only by the opening of the huge door.

Then rising from the mat, he saluted the priest respectfully.

"How like you the mute for a companion?" demanded Anselm, with a malignant smile, as he addressed himself to Caesar.

"As a spy rather, you would say," replied the Duke, turning a glance of well-affected hatred upon Otto, in order to keep up appearances.

"Oh! you have already found him watchful!" cried Anselm, completely deceived by the Prince's manner. "I am glad that he does his duty. Your Highness perceives that, true to his Oriental breeding, he sleeps upon the threshold—so that, even did you force the door, you would have to pass over his body in an attempt to leave your prison."

Caesar folded his arms across his breast, and made no reply.

The two retainers, whose duty it was to bring the

Prince's provisions to the room, now made their appearance, and Father Anselm gave them the keys to keep during the day.

It is not, however, necessary to dwell upon the routine of that prison-chamber. Suffice it to say that on the fourth night after Otto's entrance into the castle, the preparations for an escape were not only complete, but the intense darkness and the lowering state of the heavens, menacing a terrific storm, fully favouring the design.

And shortly after eleven the tempest burst forth with appalling fury. The rain fell in torrents—the thunder roared—and the lightning flashed.

"Now for the desperate venture," exclaimed Caesar. "I have passed through perils far more threatening than this."

"With resolution, courage, and prudence, we cannot fail," answered Otto Pianalla. They then set to work.

The lower halves of the two bars were speedily removed; and a portion of the silken cord was fastened in the most convenient manner for the descent;—the other piece of the rope Otto wound round his body.

"I will go first," said Caesar.

"No," exclaimed Pianalla: "I am lighter than you, and when in the court-yard below will hold the rope steady for your descent."

Caesar Borgia urged no further objection; and Otto commenced his difficult—dangerous undertaking.

He passed his body between the bars, and then threw the cord cautiously over the wooden shade which rose sloping outwards to nearly the height of his shoulders. Up this inclined plane he had to climb, menaced with the risk of its breaking. But it was strongly constructed, and remained firm.

He grasped the cord with both hands, threw himself over the top of the shade, and was now suspended between earth and heaven—at a distance of nearly fifty feet from the former.

Caesar remained at the window in a state of deep—acute—painful suspense. But in a few moments he found the cord, which he kept feeling with his hand, to be loose: he pulled it gently—and it was pulled back from below.

This was the signal agreed upon:—Otto was safe in the court-yard beneath! The Duke of Valentinois then committed himself to the same aerial path which the artist had accomplished without accident.

In less than two minutes the Prince stood by Pianalla's side, on the pavement at the foot of the tower.

But scarcely had he thus far secured his freedom, when a vivid flash of lightning illuminated the entire scene, and showed the adventurers a sentinel advancing round the angle of the next tower.

The man-at-arms discovered them, too, at the same instant, and rushing towards them, raised his battle-axe, exclaiming, "Stand! who are ye? The watchword!"

The lightning had yielded to total darkness ere he could distinguish their countenances.

With that desperate resolution for which he was so distinguished, Caesar Borgia sprang upon the armed man and hurled him to the ground.

The soldier was sorely hurt by the violence of the fall; but he exclaimed, in a loud tone, "Treachery!—an escape!"

In another moment the whole fortress echoed to those words, which passed from mouth to mouth around the court-yard—along the walls—from tower to tower—from gate to gate.

Then lights were seen moving in all directions—the watchmen carrying lanterns to aid the search of the sentries; and several of those lights as well as the forms of many men which they shadowed forth, and the tramp of numerous footsteps, mingled with the clashing of weapons and the repetition of the first cry of alarm—all were now rapidly approaching the spot where Caesar Borgia and Otto were leaning over the prostrate form of the sentinel.

And all this was the work of a few moments!

"Come!" said Otto, in a low but determined tone to his companion, whom he caught hastily by the hand: "our only chance is in flight."

Then the artist, closely followed by Caesar Borgia, turned hastily round the angle of the tower, and plunged into the total darkness which prevailed in that part of the court-yard of Linsdorf Castle.

## CHAPTER LXXIV.

### THE TABLES TURNED.

OTTO PIANALLA and Caesar Borgia rushed on through the darkness, the latter trusting himself entirely to the

guidance of the former, who seemed to be well aware of the path which he had taken.

The shouts of sentinels, the clattering of mailed feet, upon the pavement, the rapid moving to and fro of lights in the distance—in a word, the general alacrity that prevailed in the castle—convinced the two fugitives that they must make the best use of the advantage which they had already gained, for it was evident that the soldiers had for the moment lost their scent.

"Quick, my lord—quick!" said Otto, in a hasty whisper. "Our only chance is a descent from the ramparts and to swim the moat."

"Lead on, good youth," returned Caesar. "I will escape or die; but never will I return alive to that dungeon."

"Heavens! the lights are coming this way," exclaimed Otto; "they are on the ramparts already. Now, my lord, for our lives!"

And still retaining the Prince's hand—for it was so dark where they were hastening forward that they dared not venture even a few yards asunder—Otto deviated from the straight course towards the ramparts which he had at first pursued, and keeping to the right, gained the walls at a spot from which the soldiers carrying the lights were still far distant.

Rapid in his movements, as if he were acting by enchantment, Otto fastened the remnant of the silken cord to the carriage of a wall-piece, or falconet, and boldly set the example by committing himself to the rope.

In another moment Caesar Borgia followed him, and the two fugitives were now cleaving their way across the deep moat.

Suddenly they heard the drawbridge, which was not very far distant, fall with a tremendous crash, as if lowered by impatient hands, and then a rush of heavy feet across it made the fugitives aware of another danger which they incurred.

Nor were their fears vain, for in a few moments lights moved rapidly along the bank on that side of the moat which was now their only means of escape.

Fortunately for them, they had swam across the ditch, and were standing in shallow water close beneath the outer bank, or counterscarp, when the soldiers thus dispersed themselves along its margin, so that the reflection of the lights upon the water fell beyond the deep shade in which Caesar and Otto were concealed.

"Our only chance is to advance boldly to the drawbridge, and climb the woodwork which supports it on this side," whispered Otto; "and as the entrance of the castle is well guarded within the gates, it is precisely the point that I propose to reach which the soldiers will not think it necessary to watch."

"Good!" returned Caesar. "Let us repair thither."

They now waded along beneath the almost perpendicular bank, which rose to a height of five-and-twenty feet above them; but they were compelled to proceed slowly, to avoid creating an alarm by splashing the water.

At length they reached the drawbridge.

A glance upwards showed them that Otto's conjecture was right; that particular spot was not watched.

On the opposite side of the bridge the castle gates were closed, and as the sentinels who guarded the entrance were within the gates, there was not a hostile eye to sweep the drawbridge with its glance.

"We are saved," whispered Pianalla to his companion.

And they hastily clambered up the woodwork

In a few minutes they stood upon the bridge.

But scarcely had they thus touched the very threshold of safety when the castle gates were suddenly thrown open, and a man bearing a torch rushed wildly forth.

The doors closed behind him with a heavy crash.

He was enveloped in a monkish garb, but his cowl was thrown back, and the light of his torch streamed full upon his features.

"Father Anselm!" said Otto to his companion, in an almost inaudible whisper. "Let us stand back; he is our prisoner."

These words were uttered in a determined manner which well suited the disposition of the really valiant Caesar Borgia, who replied with a low and hasty, but joyful, affirmative.

"The wretches!" cried Anselm, aloud, as he approached; "but they shall not escape. That pretended mute was doubtless some creature of the Borgia—"

He uttered not another word.

From the shade of the stonework which formed the defence of that end of the bridge Otto Pianalla sprang upon him, and clutched him by the throat.

"Not a word, or you are a dead man;" he said, in a low but resolute tone.

Father Anselm dropped the torch, and struggled violently; but so tightly did the artist's hand compress his throat that he could not give vent to a cry for assistance.

Cesar Borgia placed his foot upon the torch, and pinioned the priest from behind, while Otto thrust a handkerchief into his mouth. They then hurried their prisoner along with them into the forest.

So rapidly did they proceed that they were speedily beyond the reach of danger. They then halted to secure their captive more effectually.

"I shall remove the gag," said Otto, "to prevent you from being suffocated; but if you attempt to clamour for assistance you must abide the consequences of your temerity."

Thus speaking, he took the handkerchief from the priest's mouth.

"Is it indeed you, Otto Pianalla?" demanded Anselm, in a low tone.

"It is I—the pretended mute," returned the artist. "I have fought you with your own weapons—cunning and violence—and I have conquered you. The arms of the wicked are ever turned against themselves sooner or later."

He then untied the cord which the priest wore round his waist, and, aided by the Prince, securely bound his hands together.

This was the second time that the Capuchin's emblem of humility and poverty was converted by Otto Pianalla into a bond for that wolf in sheep's clothing.

When the young artist had encountered Anselm in the Alpine convent he used that cord to render him powerless. And now the same means were adopted a second time for the same end.

"You are again my conqueror—again am I in your power, Otto," growled the priest, unable to repress the utterance of his diabolical malignity and hatred. "But times may change, and you may soon be compelled to sue for mercy at my hands."

"It will be my fault if justice be again cheated of its due, Ulric Kinis," returned Pianalla, emphatically.

"Ah! the Borgia has told you that," muttered Father Anselm, gnashing his teeth with rage.

"The Borgia keeps no terms with a wretch like you," said Caesar, disdainfully. "And now be silent, or I will stun you with this club," he added, brandishing a hug stick which he had just picked up in the forest. "I would not kill you outright, because the gibbet must not be deprived of so worthy a candidate for its honours."

Anselm was about to explode with a volume of reproaches, taunts, and words of defiance, but Caesar grasped his arm with such savage rage, and shook him so violently, that he deemed it prudent to hold his peace.

The party now proceeded towards Rosenthal Castle Otto keeping a firm hold of the prisoner on one side and Caesar on the other.

They had already advanced a considerable way into the forest when Anselm suddenly exclaimed—

"Will you hear a proposal which I have to make?"

"We can enter into no treaty that may have your liberty for its object," replied Otto.

"I can reveal a secret which you may use in a manner calculated to make your fortune," said the prisoner.

"I will not serve my own interests by any unworthy compromise," answered Pianalla, firmly.

"But you would be rejoiced to render a great—a signal—service to the Archduchess Maria?" continued the priest.

"I would go far and do much to please that august lady, who was once the companion of my sister, and who is the friend of the Countess of Aurana," said Otto; "but I dare not tamper with the dues of justice."

"You know not the importance of the secret which I could reveal," persisted Anselm. "Now that you have murdered my faithful Fritz," he added, bitterly, "two living souls alone are acquainted with the secret of which I speak. One dares not breathe it for his own sake, and the other individual is myself."

"You err in a twofold manner," answered Pianalla, by no means irritated at the taunt thrown against him.

But at the same time a light suddenly broke upon his mind in consequence of the priest's allusion to Fritz.

"In the first place," continued Pianalla, "I did not slay him whom you call your faithful dependent—no, I did not even kill him in self-defence. He attacked me on a sudden, like a bravo, and my horse trampled him beneath its feet. Secondly, you err in supposing that you and one other are the sole depositors of that secret of which you speak, for ere Fritz breathed his last he repented, and—"

"Betrayed me—betrayed the Count!" cried Anselm, brown completely off his guard by this unexpected announcement.

"You are right," said Otto, calmly, seeing that his suspicion was confirmed. "I am in the possession of papers which I shall deliver in due time into the hands of the Archduchess Maria."

Father Anselm heard these words with a cold shudder, or he now saw that he was lost.

"I shall yet have the pleasure of hearing that you become food for crows," exclaimed Cæsar, malignantly.

"My lord," said Otto, solemnly, "it is unworthy of you to triumph over a fallen man."

"But such a man!" cried the Prince.

"My lord," again observed the artist, "you compel me to remind you that you yourself are not immaculate."

The Prince was about to give utterance to some passionate and insulting reply; but he remembered that he was indebted to Otto for his freedom—perhaps for his life. He accordingly bit his lip, and stifled his resentment.

There was another long interval of silence.

"I have yet one more condition to propose," said Anselm, at length. "Promise me my freedom—for I will believe you, Pianalla, if you pledge yourself—and I will furnish you with such an account of the entire ramifications of the Bloody League—the names of its chiefs, its system of administration, the places where its meetings are held, the inns throughout Germany where its most mysterious deeds are executed—all this will I fully and truthfully explain to you in such a way that you shall be enabled to give that information to his Imperial Majesty which will empower him to crush the Holy Vehm in his dominions."

"Diabolical traitor!" cried Cæsar Borgia, furiously.

"Yes—yes, you are a traitor," said Otto, "and I despise you; for even the skulking thief remains true to his companions in iniquity. No, wretched man, you cannot effect a compromise with me. Much as I should be gratified to possess the information necessary to enable my sovereign to annihilate the hideous despotism of the Vehm, I will not—I dare not—purchase that knowledge at the price you demand. You are a prisoner, and such shall you remain until his Majesty issue the imperial decree that must decide your fate."

The priest, again baffled, and finding his last hope disappointed, relapsed into a moody and savage silence.

Nor was this silence again interrupted during the march to Rosenthal Castle. It was nearly three in the morning when the party reached that fortress.

On their arrival, Otto directed Father Anselm to be taken to a place of security, and to be guarded by two sentinels. He then conducted Cæsar to his own apartment, where they snatched a few hours of much-needed repose.

Great was the joy of the Baron when upon awaking in the morning he learnt the return of Otto, whose strange disappearance for several days had not a little perplexed him. But that joy was considerably enhanced when he was informed, not only that the Prince had escaped from Einsdorf Castle, but that the individual who had caused his captivity was actually himself a prisoner at Rosenthal.

Otto, having cleansed himself from the chemical dye, and resumed his natural appearance, as well as having exchanged his Oriental garb for suitable clothing, obtained an interview with the Baron, and communicated to him enough to show who Father Anselm really was.

He then intimated his intention of setting out for Vienna on the following day, and the Baron immediately offered him an escort of his own retainers, to protect himself, and to take charge of the prisoner, whom he proposed to conduct to the capital.

This offer was gratefully accepted, and the Baron insisted upon Otto's acceptance of a ring of costly price, as an acknowledgment of the service performed by the young man in having effected the liberation of Cæsar Borgia.

The artist steadily refused to receive the gift as a reward, but at length consented to wear it as a token of the Baron's friendship.

Meantime, Cæsar had repaired to the apartment of his sister, and surprised her with his sudden appearance at the castle. He communicated to her the whole particulars of his release, and Lucreza, concealing her spite against the artist for having refused her love, spoke of him in terms of the highest praise.

In the course of that day Otto paid another visit to the cemetery where the remains of his mother were deposited, and was gratified by finding that the sexton and the venerable priest had fully accomplished his wishes.

A stone, with a suitable inscription, marked the halcyon spot.

He next proceeded to the dwelling of the old pastor, of whom he took leave.

He continued his way to Wittenberg, and was cordially received by his friend, who returned to him the packet intended for the Archduchess, as well as the letters and the purse of gold.

Having bade farewell to that kind friend, Otto Pianalla returned to Rosenthal Castle.

## CHAPTER LXXV.

### THE EXAMINATION.

Six weeks have elapsed since the incidents related in the preceding chapter, and the scene again shifts to Vienna.

It was morning, and Father Anselm awoke to the conviction that a hideous dream which had oppressed him in his slumber had borrowed its horrors from the stern reality of his position. He was in a dungeon—the strongest and best guarded in the criminal prison of Vienna.

Many, many years previously had he been an inmate of that self-same cell, when doomed to death for his share in the treason of the Chamber of the Cradle.

He rose from his hard pallet, hastily dressed himself, and then paced the dungeon with agitated steps, uttering low growling sounds of rage, and resembling a wild beast in its narrow cage.

Presently the door opened, and a gaoler made his appearance with the prisoner's breakfast.

"My friend," said Anselm, in a low and hurried whisper, "at the Capuchin Convent in the Julian Alps, but in a spot which I alone can point out, there is a hidden treasure—my own gold. Enable me to escape from this horrible place—accompany me thither—and the half of that treasure shall be yours."

The man only shook his head.

"I will give you all—all," urged the prisoner, in a hoarse, but persuasive tone.

"And you think that I am such an idiot as to believe you?" said the turnkey.

"I declare by everything sacred——" began Anselm, for so we had better continue to call him.

"Were I to agree to accompany you, you would murder me by the way," interrupted the man, sharply. "A truce to this nonsense, Ulric Kinis; you have mistaken me altogether. Despatch your breakfast, and follow me to the presence of certain high personages, who seek an interview with you."

"I require no food for the present," said Anselm.

"Lead on—I am ready."

"Nay, I will rather follow you," cried the turnkey. "I like not such an one as Ulric Kinis to be behind me."

"Dog!" exclaimed the prisoner, fixing a savage glance upon the man.

Then, as if he considered him to be unworthy of further notice, the priest turned slowly from the dungeon.

"Straight along the passage, Ulric," said the gaoler, following close at his heels. "You know the way pretty well, however, for by all accounts this place has been your habitation before. It was not then my good luck to be employed in the establishment, or I should have had the honour of waiting on you, as I do now," continued the man, in a jeering tone. "Please to turn to the right, and straight on again, up the stone steps there, and now open the door at the top."

Father Anselm did as he was desired, and found himself in the head gaoler's private apartment, where several persons were assembled.

These were the Archduke Leopold and the Archduchess Maria, the Count and Countess of Aurana, the Baron and Baroness of Czernin, and Otto Pianalla.

The prisoner cast a scowling glance upon the company in whose presence he thus found himself; but nothing could equal the fiend-like malice expressed in the look that he threw on the young artist.

"Ulric Kinis," said the Archduke Leopold, "you will do well to reply to the questions which I am about to put to you, for you can scarcely be so hardened in iniquity as to refuse the only compensation which you can make to one whom your hand deprived of a father—perhaps also of a mother."

The Archduchess wiped away her tears as her husband glanced affectionately towards her.

"What advantage shall I gain by answering your questions, my lord?" demanded the prisoner, insolently.

"You cannot think that I should enter into conditions with you," returned the Archduke. "At the same time, I will undertake to declare that your present conduct will greatly influence the sentence which the proper authorities may soon have to pass upon you."

"Will my life be spared if I confess all?" said Father Anselm. "For I see that you possess some little information on a particular subject, but that you require more."

"If your information tends to corroborate certain facts already known to us I will intercede with my imperial uncle on your behalf, and pray a commutation of the penalty of death to imprisonment for the remainder of your days. I have now said more than I had at first intended upon this point," added the Archduke.

"Question me, my lord, and I will answer truly—on the condition specified," said the prisoner, hope now returning to his soul.

"Ulric Kinis," continued the Archduke, in an impressive manner, "the hand of Providence has by degrees elucidated a terrible mystery. Mark how that same all-wise, all-seeing Power has listened to the voice of blood, which cried up from earth to Heaven. Attend to the few details, which demonstrate how God himself has placed his chosen agents in the way to discover crimes perpetrated long ago."

"In the year 1493 the Countess of Aurana was snatched from her father's roof, and carried to the Castle of Linsdorf. There she was imprisoned in certain apartments, one of which was an oratory. In this oratory the Countess beheld two portraits, which were still there some few weeks ago. There is every reason to believe that these are the portraits of the late Count Sigmund and the Countess Ildegarda of Linsdorf. Is the conjecture a true one?"

"It is, my lord," was the prisoner's answer.

"The Lady Theresa observed the resemblance which the portrait of the Countess Ildegarda bore the Archduchess Maria, but she attached but little importance to the matter, concluding that it merely involved a coincidence common in the world, and believing also that the parentage of the Archduchess was well known to her. Accident revealed to the Lady Theresa, during her captivity at Linsdorf, the existence of a chamber which had evidently been used as a place of confinement for some unfortunate victim. In that room the Lady Theresa discovered a manuscript, which was considerably injured by time, but the legible portions of which prove how deep were the wrongs of the unhappy prisoner who penned those affecting lines. Did you ever behold the handwriting of the late Countess of Linsdorf?"

"I have seen it, and should doubtless recognise it," replied Anselm.

"Draw near," said the Archduke, producing the manuscript, "and cast your eyes over this melancholy document."

"That is the writing of the Countess Ildegarda," observed the prisoner, without hesitation, and after a moment's scrutiny of the manuscript. "Her ladyship was highly accomplished, and wrote a beautiful, but peculiar hand."

Maria's tears fell abundantly at this stage of the examination, but she refused to leave the room where an inquiry of such importance to herself was in progress.

"The Lady Theresa perused this manuscript," continued the Archduke, "and was led by its contents to infer that the writer was the Countess Ildegarda. Still, however, she saw no connexion between the incidents alluded to in the mournful document and the parentage of the Archduchess Maria, because she believed the Archduchess to have indeed been born of poor parents. The Lady Theresa subsequently showed the manuscript to her father, who advised her to destroy it, or at least maintain strict silence relative to her possession of it, as he was unwilling to afford any new ground of dispute or ill-feeling between himself and the Count of Linsdorf."

"Providence so willed it that the Lady Theresa decided upon keeping the manuscript, and it has become an important proof in substantiating the facts which I am seeking to establish. I now pass on to another chain of incidents, which testify to the wisdom of Heaven in allowing a deep mystery to be elucidated by human means."

"Some weeks ago Messer Pianalla was in the vicinity of Linsdorf, when he was attacked by a villain, who perished in attempting the life of this good young man. But ere the bravo breathed his last, he enjoined Messer Pianalla to convey to the Archduchess a small packet which was sewn between the linings of his doublet. This packet contained a short note, the contents of which you shall hear."

The Archduke then read the letter referred to:—

"Lady, whenever this paper meets your eyes, the writer will be no more. He dares not endanger his safety while living, but when death shall have closed his

eyes you may learn a secret that weighs heavily upon his soul. Lady, you are not, as you have hitherto supposed, the daughter of those poor peasants who were believed to be the authors of your being."

"Your parents were Count Sigmund of Linsdorf and the Countess Ildegarda. The former died by the hand of Ulric Kinis, now known in the world by the name of Father Anselm. Your unfortunate mother was poisoned. These crimes were perpetrated by the command of your uncle, the present Count Manfred of Linsdorf. To me was allotted the task of disposing of you when an infant; Count Manfred ordered me to kill you. I could not find it in my heart to murder an innocent babe, and I accordingly entrusted you to the care of poor relatives of mine—that peasant and his wife who took care of you for a short time."

"They died within a few days of each other, victims of a malignant fever; and as I had previously left that part of the country, I never learnt until some few months ago what had become of you. Then I heard from Father Anselm, to whom I had communicated the manner in which I had disposed of you, the facts that you were living, and had become the wife of the Archduke Leopold. How Father Anselm discovered your identity I know not."

"Lady, amongst many bad deeds which I have committed, this alone preys upon my mind, and haunts me in my dreams."

"Perhaps the atonement which I now endeavour to make by revealing to you the secret of your birth may induce you to have masses said for my soul—for rest well assured, lady, that these lines will never meet your eyes till I shall be no more."

"HUGO WIELAND:

"June 16th, 1497."

Profound was the grief of the Archduchess as her illustrious husband read this letter, for although she was previously acquainted with its contents, it aroused in her mind all the anguish which had been excited there when she first perused that dread revelation concerning the fate of those to whom she was indebted for her being.

She, however, received the sweetest consolation from her beloved friend Theresa, and she conquered her emotions to some extent when the reading of the document was concluded.

"You have heard the contents of this letter," said the Archduke to Father Anselm; "are its statements true?"

"True in every particular," was the reply.

"Bear witness," exclaimed the Prince, turning towards his friends—"bear witness to the confession of the prisoner. He acknowledges that the Archduchess Maria is the daughter of the Count and Countess of Linsdorf, who were cruelly murdered by command of their most unnatural relative."

"Inscrutable are the ways of that Providence which has thus brought this foul deed to light. Kinis, this excellent young man," continued the Prince, indicating Pianalla with a gesture, "has also seen these portraits which hang in the oratory of Linsdorf Castle, and he also was struck by the resemblance existing between the Archduchess and the picture of her mother. He has, moreover, been in that very room where the poor lady was imprisoned, and where she doubtless breathed her last."

"He can testify to the gloom of that horrible dungeon, where she was so mercilessly confined. Ulric Kinis, the annals of crime present to view no blacker deed than this, in which you were an agent. It now remains for you to furnish me with a complete written confession of the entire details of those most barbarous murders, and his Imperial Majesty will thereupon adopt the proper means to bring Manfred of Linsdorf to justice."

"I will furnish your Imperial Highness with the confession required," said Anselm, "By to-morrow morning it shall be ready."

"I have now to question you upon another subject," observed the Archduke. "You see near me a nobleman whom you retained for many years in captivity at the convent in the Julian Alps. Explain the motive of that imprisonment."

"The Baron of Czernin penetrated into the mansion which Caesar Borgia and his sister Lucrezia inhabited at Venice prior to the elevation of their father to the Papedom," said Anselm, "and there he beheld certain appearances which, if proclaimed to the world, might have engendered strange suspicions prejudicial to the interests of that family. At the period to which I allude, the Borgias had already set on foot those intrigues which paved the way for the election of Alexander VI., and they were, moreover, engaged in the manufacture of

those poisons which were used to clear their path of obnoxious individuals or dangerous foes.

"Thence their temporary seclusion at Venice; thence, also, their dread of having their secrets known. I was in their pay, and I hesitated not to become the gaoler of the Baron of Czernin."

"Your statement confirms the opinions already formed by the Baron and his friends relative to the primal motive of his imprisonment," said the Archduke. "It is, nevertheless, satisfactory to obtain additional proofs of the villainy of the Borgias, to whom my imperial uncle has afforded an asylum in his dominions."

"The same messenger, my lord," added the Prince, turning towards the Baron, "who will convey to the lord of Rosenthal the imperial commands to make the Count of Linsdorf his prisoner will be the bearer of a message directing the expulsion of the Borgias from Germany. I have already ascertained the pleasure of his Majesty in this respect."

"I would suggest to your Highness," said Otto Pinnalla, "that the Count of Linsdorf is a desperate man, and will defend himself against the Baron of Rosenthal to the last extremity."

"There is an easy, short, and certain method of capturing the Count of Linsdorf," observed Father Anselm, "and as he has no reason to expect mercy at my hands, I care not if I be instrumental in insuring his arrest."

"Proceed," said the Archduke.

The prisoner made no immediate reply, but seated himself at the table, on which there were writing materials, and penned the following note:—

"HERMAN,—

"By the Cord and Dagger you are commanded to entice Manfred, Count of Linsdorf, to the Black Swan, and deliver him into the custody of the bearer of this: wherein see that you fail not.

"++ ANSELM."

"This, my lord," said the prisoner, handing the note to the Archduke "will prove effectual. The person to whom it is addressed is the master of the Black Swan wherein named, and will not dare to disobey my command, for even from the depths of a dungeon the voice of a chief of the Vehm is all-powerful."

"I am acquainted with that same Herman, my lord," observed Otto, "but never knew until now that he was a member of the Secret Tribunal."

"Think you that he would boast of his alliance with the mysterious fraternity?" demanded Anselm, with a sneer. "I presume that my presence is no longer required here," continued the prisoner; "and as my narrative will be somewhat lengthy, there need be no unnecessary delay ere I commence it."

The Archduke made a sign to the gaoler, who conducted Father Anselm back to his dungeon.

On the following day the same persons were again assembled in the prison, and Anselm then presented his narrative of crime.

That terrible document will be found in the ensuing chapter.

## CHAPTER LXXVI.

### FATHER ANSELM'S HISTORY.

"TWENTY-SIX years and a half have now elapsed since I was doomed to death by the Supreme Tribunal of Vienna.

I need not state the crime nor the particulars of that memorable trial which elucidated the conspiracy of the Chamber of the Cradle. Neither is it necessary to enter into any details respecting the public execution which took place on the walls of Vienna. Five persons were suspended to the ignominious tree on that morning: namely, myself, the physician who conceived the plot, his wife, his sister, and another female whose part in the conspiracy was to convey the sister's child to the palace at the appointed hour. Yes—five of us, amongst whom were three women, passed through the hands of the public executioner on that terrible day. But the ignominious doom was not fatal to all. No: for some hours afterwards I seemed to awake slowly and painfully from a profound sleep that left behind it the impression of having been filled with horrible visions. Light dawned in my eyes—sensations returned to my organs—and reason revisited my brain, all by such gradient advances—such almost imperceptible approaches—that it seemed as if I were a marble statue into which the ingenuity of cunning alchemist was gradually infusing the principles of life. But what agonising feelings did I experience in all my limbs! And what horrible ideas grew every

moment more and more intelligible in my mind; until all the dread scenes of the morning rose before me, like hideous spectres. I turned my head with difficulty:—on the inclined plane of a bench to my right lay a corpse:—I averted my looks with alarm and disgust; but as I glanced to the left, I beheld another corpse, stretched out in a similar manner. A little reflection showed me that I also was occupying the place of a corpse! I tried to rise, and at length succeeded so far as to sit up. My head seemed to turn round—my sight was dim, and the objects appeared to swim before me. But I could distinguish four dead bodies in the room, each stretched on a sloping table! I lay down again, and closed my eyes against the sad spectacle. It was, however, some time before I could so far collect my thoughts as to arrive at a perfect sense of my condition. From the moment that I first obtained a glimpse of the light in that chamber—from the instant when I felt that I was alive—perhaps an hour elapsed ere I recovered my reasoning faculties sufficiently to enable me to comprehend that I was in the gaol dissecting-room!

"In another hour I was enabled to rise and walk; and with returning strength came back my courage also. I looked around for the means of escape. The windows were small and strongly barred. The door was weak and indifferently secured:—indeed, it could only have been closed at all for the purpose of preventing the intrusion of the prison dependants. To force the door was consequently an easy task: I accomplished it, and entered an adjoining room. There I found a cloak—probably belonging to the surgeon; and a further inspection showed me a closet in a recess. It was now dusk, and, as I was well aware that the dissection of criminals in the prisons usually commenced immediately after sunset, I knew that there was no time to be lost. I forced open the cupboard, and found that it contained all the various implements used in anatomy. There were also two or three frocks of coarse stuff, such as surgeons wear over their clothes when engaged in dissections. How I shuddered as those objects met my eyes! I might have lingered in a deep trance, and thus have actually perished by the scalpel instead of by the rope! It struck me that one of those smocks might be useful for disguise: I accordingly took it with me. Enveloped in the ample cloak, I passed out of the prison with the greatest ease, because the entrance leading to the surgeon's rooms is not guarded, as it has no communication with the department where the prisoners are confined.

"Never did I experience such fervent joy as when I found myself safe beyond the walls of Vienna. But in a short time the pangs of hunger oppressed me; and I soon became ready to faint for want of food. I had not a single coin about me—at least, I believed not. Then I thought of disposing of the cloak, and wearing the smock over my own clothes, which consisted of a miserable ragged suit that had been given to me in prison when my military garb was taken from me. I rested myself beneath a tree at the entrance of a village about two leagues from Vienna: and there I remained until the first streak of morning appeared in the east. Then I took off the cloak and put on the smock, preparatory to entering the village; but how great was my surprise when I discovered a few crowns in a pocket belonging to the dissecting garment! Hope revived within me; I resolved upon retaining the cloak at least for the present; and at the village I procured food.

"I was completely at a loss what course to adopt. My active mind could not bear the idea of obscurity, poverty, and indolence. I revolved various plans in my imagination—recalled to memory many persons with whom I had been acquainted. At length the name of Manfred, son of the old Count of Linsdorf (who was then living) occurred to my mind. Two years before he had served as a volunteer in the Army of the Danube which was formed to resist the encroachments of the Ottomans on the Transylvanian frontier. He enjoyed the rank of an officer; and I belonged to his corps. He was of a reserved and moody disposition, save when in his cups—and then he was communicative to a fault. On evening I had rendered him some trifling service, and he invited me to partake of a flagon of wine with him. I thanked him for that condescension on the part of the son of a great noble towards a poor soldier like myself; and he immediately exclaimed, 'I am almost as humble and as poor as you are! What honour or wealth do you suppose can belong to the younger son of a feudal peer, whose vast estates must all pass to his elder born! Ah! the misery of being a younger son—soon to be a dependant on the bounty of an elder brother!'—Those words made a deep impression



on me at the time: they seemed to be the index of certain wishes and aspirations which lurked in Manfred's soul. Shortly afterwards the Turkish war ended; the Army of the Danube was disbanded; Manfred returned to his father's domains; and I was draughted into the Imperial Guards.

"I had never seen nor heard of Manfred since the time I have just alluded to; but now that I was in so desperate a position—an outcast and in constant danger of detection—his name recurred to my memory. I felt convinced that he was the very man—unless his circumstances had strangely altered—who required such an agent as I was prepared to be. I remembered that strange exclamation above mentioned:—and I deemed it significant—nay, even prophetic! I weighed the matter well in my mind, and at length determined to repair to Linsdorf. The journey was long and tedious: but at length I reached the castle. The old Count and his elder son Sigismund were residing there; but I learnt that Manfred was on bad terms with his relatives, and occupied a small house four or five leagues distant from the castle. Thither I proceeded. Manfred was at home, and instantly granted me an interview. But when I stood in his presence, he seemed alarmed—for he recollected my countenance. 'Had not one Ulric Kinis been recently hanged at Vienna,' he exclaimed, 'I should believe that you were he.'—I then told him all that had occurred; and he heard me with profound astonishment.—'What do you require of me?' he said, when I had concluded my history.—'To enter your service,' was my reply.—'I have no employment to give you,' he said, 'I am poor, and subsisting on a small allowance from my father, with whom I am at variance because of his harshness to me on account of certain follies which he might well have pardoned.'—'It is precisely because you are poor, that you should aim at wealth,' I said: 'it is because you are a dependant, that you should strive to become a master; it is because you have neither title nor land, that you should endeavour to obtain both. And if you have courage to act, I am ready to aid you.'—We exchanged significant glances: two such men as he and I could not do otherwise than come to a speedy understanding. He took me into his service; and I assumed the name of Felix Zetter.

"When I thus became enlisted in the cause of Manfred, he had already a dependant attached to his person, and who was blindly devoted to his interests. This was Hugo, who subsequently took the name of Fritz. Hugo was attached to his young master, but had never dreamt of helping him to rank and riches by illegitimate means. It was not, however, difficult to induce Hugo to second us in the schemes which we soon began seriously to discuss, for the removal of Sigismund from this earthly sphere. Manfred hesitated not to entertain the fratricide idea; but he feared to put it into execution during his father's life-time. The old Count knew his younger son's evil disposition so well, that were Sigismund to die under suspicious circumstances, the deed would be attributed to the surviving brother who profited by that death. Time elapsed quickly—and nothing was done. Manfred was willing enough—but fearful. He vacillated between his desire for aggrandisement and his alarm of detection. Thus two years passed. At length, by the generous intervention of Sigismund, a reconciliation was effected between the old Count and Manfred; and the latter returned to take up his abode at the Castle of Linsdorf. Hugo and myself accompanied him.

"Although the old Count had consented to receive his younger son once more into the paternal dwelling, it was evident that Sigismund was the father's favourite, and that Manfred was treated with frequent harshness and constant coolness. This was scarcely surprising, when it is remembered that Sigismund was all generosity of disposition and nobility of soul, and Manfred dissipated, deceitful, and desiguing. Be the causes of that paternal preference what they might, it is certain that Manfred's haughty and vindictive spirit was soon driven to desperation; and he at length determined to take a bold step to rid himself of all existing obstacles to the attainment of rank, power, and riches. He resolved upon the deaths of both his father and brother! A slow poison was procured, and a portion infused into the drinking-cups of the old Count and Sigismund at the evening banquet. The Count disliked the taste of his wine, after he had sipped a few drops, and observed that it possessed a nauseous flavour. Sigismund tasted the wine in his cup, and echoed his father's complaint. Manfred changed colour and became fearfully embarrassed; then, by way of extricating himself from the dilemma in which he found himself placed, he declared in a stammering tone that 'it was

strange, as his wine was perfectly good.' Had he found fault likewise with the liquor, he would probably have escaped suspicion; but that absurd remark excited the attention of his father. The old Count darted on him a piercing look, exclaiming at the same time, with a shudder, 'It is impossible! yes—impossible! And yet——' He stopped short, and ordered the henchman to lock up the two ill-flavoured goblets of wine until the morrow. That night Manfred sought the henchman, and endeavoured to persuade him to empty the cups and fill them with fresh wine. The domestic steadily refused; and the application made to him was duly reported to the Count in the morning. The incident only tended to confirm the horrible suspicion which his lordship had entertained. A skilful alchemist residing at Wittenberg was sent for; and he subjected the wine contained in the two goblets to various tests. The result was fatal to the character of Manfred. The old Count expelled him from the castle, and declared that he renounced him for ever.

"Hugo and myself accompanied our fallen master. As we were leaving the fortress, Sigismund hastily accosted his brother, and said, 'My dear Manfred, I sincerely forgive you—forgive you from the bottom of my heart! I will pray to the Holy Virgin to turn your heart! Here is a purse: it is well filled; and, if you will from time to time acquaint me with your place of abode, I will take care you shall not want!'—He then hastened away; and Manfred departed from the paternal home, attended by me and Hugo. His plans were speedily settled. 'So long as my father is alive,' he said to us, 'all hopes of accomplishing my designs are vain. But when he shall be no more, then——'; and he smiled darkly—significantly, however, to us.—'It is my intention to join the imperial army,' he continued: 'my brother will be thereby thrown off his guard; he will imagine that I have repented of my evil intentions towards him, and that I have resolved to earn an honourable name for myself. You, my faithful servitors, will remain in this neighbourhood, ready to forward to me tidings of any event of importance that may occur at the castle.'—He departed for Vienna, and Hugo and myself took up our abode at Wittenberg.

"From time to time I obtained an interview with the Lord Sigismund, whom I assured on each occasion that I had just arrived from Vienna, where his brother was employed as a subaltern officer in the Imperial Guards. Sigismund always gave me a well-filled purse; and thus Hugo and myself were enabled to live comfortably at Wittenberg. About two years after the departure of Manfred, the Lord Sigismund was united to the Lady Ildegarda. This event was followed in a year by the death of the old Count; and Sigismund became master of the vast estates of Linsdorf. Hugo repaired to Vienna with the intelligence; and Manfred returned with him privately to Wittenberg.

"I must now state that during his residence in the metropolis Manfred had become a member of the Holy Vehm; and his first act on arriving at Wittenberg was to initiate Hugo and myself as brethren in that fraternity, of which our master was already a chief. Indeed he had succeeded in obtaining a rescript from the Supreme Council of Westphalia, nominating him to the post of District-Ruler of the province of Wittenberg. Our plans were speedily settled. Hugo and myself remained in the town; and Manfred repaired to the castle, where the Countess had just become the mother of a female child. Count Sigismund received his brother with open arms, and ordered apartments to be assigned to him in the castle. He moreover settled upon him a handsome revenue, and exerted himself in every possible manner to render Manfred's condition happy. A few weeks thus passed, during which Sigismund seldom left the castle. But when his beloved wife was restored to health, the Count resumed his favourite sport—the chase. Manfred had frequent meetings with Hugo and myself, and gave us his instructions. Our employment was now to watch for a favourable opportunity of assassinating Count Sigismund.

"One day, when, in pursuance of information furnished by Manfred, I was lying in wait amidst some bushes on a heath, about two leagues from the castle, I beheld a man approaching, leading his horse, which was lame. As he drew near, I recognised Count Sigismund. He had evidently been separated from his attendants by the accident of his steed's lameness; for he blew his hunting bugle several times, and ascended an eminence to sweep the open portion of the country with his looks. But he could not catch a glimpse of those whom he sought. He walked slowly on, and at length passed the spot where I was concealed. I rushed upon him with the fury of a

iger, and buried my dagger in his breast. He fell, with a low moan; and ere he breathed his last he murmured the name of Manfred as he cast a look of horror and reproach upon me. He knew me—and he expired with the conviction that I was the agent of his brother in perpetrating that fearful deed! I hastily twisted the symbolic cord around the handle of the dagger, and left the weapon lying by the side of the corpse.

"The body was discovered by the Count's retainers, on their way back from the chase, and was conveyed to the castle. It would be impossible to describe the grief of the Countess Ildegarda: I subsequently learnt from those who were present when she received the dread tidings, that she became frantic. The terrible ebullition of her voice having forced a vent, an equally appalling reaction took place, and she fell into a profound apathy—as if her reason were unbinged. She was conducted to her own chamber; and Dame Winifred, an artful woman, who possessed the peculiar faculty of maintaining the utmost composure of countenance under all circumstances, was appointed to attend upon her. She had been a servant in the castle for some years, and was devotedly attached to the interests of Manfred. A few days after Sigismund's death, Hugo and myself once more became inmates of the castle.

"The Countess Ildegarda was now surrounded by enemies. Manfred, assuming to himself the right of guardianship of the infant heiress, behaved as the master of the establishment. He discharged those dependants who were devoted to the late Count, and supplied their places by persons chosen from the local members of the realm. His course was now easy. The Countess Ildegarda was one night conveyed to the prison chamber; and Hugo was appointed to attend upon her. Her child, the infant heiress, was taken from her; and Hugo received orders to destroy the babe. With that command he did not, however, comply; but he entrusted the child to poor relatives of his own, who resided in the neighbourhood. This fact was not communicated by him to me until some time after we had both left the service of Manfred.

"The Countess being thus immured and the child supposed to have been made away with, Manfred gave out that the unhappy lady, reduced to despair by the murder of her husband, had put an end not only to her own existence but also to that of her child. There were two tombs, followed closely the one upon the other: the first was for Sigismund, whose body really reposed in the coffin that was consigned to the family vault in the chapel of Linsdorf; and the second was for the Countess and her child; but the coffin in this latter contained only stones and dirt. Thus did Manfred become Count of Linsdorf!

"The Countess Ildegarda was a beautiful woman; and Manfred's passions were excited by her charms. He was ever famed as a desperate libertine; and his reckless conduct in prosecuting his amours and intrigues had been the principal cause of his misunderstanding with his father. Now that Ildegarda was in his power, he saw no reason why he should hesitate to make her subservient to his wishes. Several weeks, however, elapsed ere he could command sufficient courage to enable him to see the lady whom he had so cruelly injured. In the meantime, Hugo had allowed himself to be persuaded by her representations that if she were compelled to remain alone with her own thoughts, and with nothing to abstract her mind from the contemplation of her miseries, she would become raving mad; and he supplied her privately with a missal and writing materials. But he implored her not to allow that indulgence to transpire, should she be visited by the Count, whose vengeance he feared. He moreover assured her—as was the fact—that when he ought the prison-chamber to convey her meals thither, the Count, frequently accompanied him as far as the door in the wainscot of the oratory, in order to overhear anything she might say to Hugo. The Count had charged Hugo not to inform her that her child was no more, but held out to her hopes that the infant should be restored to her, if she would compose herself and act in all respects agreeably to the wishes of Count Manfred. Hugo, it appears, was only too glad to receive this permission to impart some consolation to Ildegarda in respect to the babe; and while Manfred thought he was uttering a falsehood representing it to be alive, he was really adhering to strict truth. Sometimes, the Count would despatch me to listen at the wainscot door while Hugo entered the prison-chamber; for Manfred was ever suspicious, even those who served him best.

"I think that nearly two months must have elapsed ere Count Manfred presented himself to the Lady Ilde-

garda. I knew not then what transpired at that first interview; but I well remember that his lordship returned to his own apartments towering with rage, and vented his spite (as was his wont) upon Hugo, myself, and Winifred—who were the very three persons that of all the world he should have studied to conciliate, inasmuch as we were the depositors of his secrets. A day or two afterwards the Count visited the Lady Ildegarda in the prison-chamber again; and when I next saw his lordship, he said to me in a tone of bitter malignity, 'She scorns me—she upbraids me—she reviles me! I have given her three days to decide whether she will listen to my proposals; and if she refuse at the expiration of that period, then she shall die!'—That third day came, and Hugo happened to be taken with a sudden illness. I was accordingly appointed to succeed him in attending upon the imprisoned lady. In the afternoon the Count visited her for the last time. He was with her nearly an hour; and when he rejoined me, who was waiting for him in one of the neighbouring apartments, his countenance was black with rage. 'She must die, Felix,' he said in an emphatic manner. In the evening he gave me a dark powder to mix with the food prepared for her supper. I conveyed the meal to her. She endeavoured to induce me to break the stubborn silence which I maintained; but vainly! I spread the supper upon the table, and departed. In the morning when I returned thither she was no more!—and on the ensuing night Count Manfred and myself buried the corpse in a vault beneath the tower in which the prison-chamber is situated.

"That chamber was then carefully closed; and never (as I was lately informed by Count Manfred) had it been used again until Caesar Borgia was consigned to it. Then, when the Lord of Linsdorf and myself visited it for the purpose of commanding suitable arrangements to be made for the reception of a new prisoner, we found the door fallen from its hinges through old age. And within that chamber, too, we saw, on the same occasion, the vestiges of the last meal that the Countess Ildegarda ever partook of—and partook of so fatally! There were the soiled and tattered remnants of the napkin—the rusted knives and forks—the dust-blackened plates and dishes—the flagon and drinking-cup, covered with dense cobwebs!

"But let me resume the thread of my narrative in due order of continuity. No sooner did Lord Manfred imagine himself secure in the enjoyment of his rank and wealth, by the deaths of his brother and Ildegarda, and by the supposed murder of their infant daughter, than his naturally tyrannical disposition manifested itself in a way that was intolerable to those around him. He became the Free Count of the Wittenberg district; and thus—by the union of his lawful power as a peer of the German empire with his illicit influence as a Chief of the Holy Vehm—he possessed resources terrible indeed for purposes of oppression and of mischief. Impatient of his despotism, and dissatisfied with the limited rewards which we received for the services rendered him by us, Hugo and myself left him a short time after the death of the Countess Ildegarda. Twenty-one years have elapsed since that period, and many of the world's strange phases have during that time come within the scope of my experience. But with any details on those points I need not occupy your attention. I have only one incident, which at all regards the present topic, to relate. It is the manner in which I discovered the identity of the Archduchess with the daughter of the murdered Count and Countess of Linsdorf.

"At the beginning of the present year I was in Rome. Accident threw me in the way of a person named Schurmann, who, I found, had been intimately acquainted with the impostor Gregory Walstein, and had passed some months with him in Vienna. During the conversation which I had with Schurmann, I learnt much relative to the Archduchess Maria. This information he had obtained from Gregory Walstein, who received it from his wife, Ida. Schurmann told me that the Archduchess was the daughter of poor parents, whom he named; that they had died in her infancy; and that the mother of the Lady Theresa had taken charge of the orphan, and brought her up at Rosenthal Castle. I was struck with this statement. Fritz, or rather Hugo, long ago made me acquainted with the manner in which he had disposed of the heiress of Linsdorf, when an infant; and I now discovered, from Schurmann's information, that the alleged parents of the Archduchess were none other than Hugo's relations. I moreover knew that those poor people had no children of their own; and I felt convinced of the identity which has since been established. I, how-

ever, instituted inquiries, and ascertained that the age of the Archduchess precisely corresponded with that which the daughter of Count Sigismund and Ildegarda must have attained were she really alive. But to convince myself fully on this head,—for the discovery was an important one, and promised a rich harvest,—I came to Vienna in a deep disguise a few months ago, and beheld the Archduchess issue from the ducal palace, leaning upon the arm of my lord, her husband. One glance at her countenance was sufficient: the Countess Ildegarda lived again in the person of her daughter!"

## CHAPTER LXXVII.

### FAUST AND FATHER ANSELM.

It was evening; and Father Anselm was seated in his dungeon.

An iron lamp, suspended from the ceiling, shed but a dim light around,—enough, however, to shadow forth the gloomy features of that cell, and bring into strong relief the dark form of the prisoner.

His sinister countenance wore a smile of ferocious triumph; and he muttered to himself, "I have avenged myself on Manfred of Linsdorf; and bitterly will he rue the day when he treated me with ingratitude and tyranny. But wherefore does not Faust come? Could the gaoler have deceived me? has he not delivered my message?"

The prisoner was interrupted by the sounds of footsteps approaching his cell; the door was opened: and the gaoler having given admittance to the Count of Aurana, asked when he should return.

"Will our interview be a long one?" demanded Faust of Father Anselm; "for I am at a loss to conjecture what affair of importance could have induced you to send so pressing a message requiring my presence here."

"I shall not detain your lordship many minutes," was the reply.

The gaoler heard this answer, and withdrew, saying, "I shall return shortly."

Anselm waited until the man's retreating steps were no longer heard: then approaching close to Faust, he said, in a low but emphatic tone, "I require my freedom; and it is you who must procure it."

"What means this insolent assurance?" cried the Count, stepping back, and eyeing the prisoner with a mixture of sternness and contempt.

"Tis you who must lower your tone of assurance, proud noble," returned Anselm. "Think you that I have forgotten the malignity with which you exposed me to the Orsini in the Castle of Saint Angelo at Rome—when you advocated the cause of Cæsar Borgia, the arch-poisoner? But although I possess the means of hurling the thunders of a terrible vengeance at your head, I choose rather to render those means subservient to my own interests. In a word, I demand my freedom—and your all-powerful influence at the court must obtain it."

"You will find yourself in error, murderous reptile, whom I could crush beneath my heel!"

"And are not you a murderer also, my lord?" retorted Anselm. "Did not you permit Ida, your paramour, to poison the child of which you were the father? It is not necessary that a man should deal the blow or administer the venomous cup with his own hand to make him a murderer!"

"Fool!" cried Faust, contemptuously: "what idle tale is this with which thou thinkest to intimidate me?"

"It is no idle tale, my lord," said Anselm, in a tone of haughty confidence; "and thou knowest full well that I speak truly. I hold the proofs of all I assert: the document by which you acknowledge the child to be your own—the letters wherein its murder is arranged between Ida and yourself,—all are in my possession. Thou canst not deny the facts which they proclaim; and, powerful though you be, one word from my lips will consign the high and wealthy Count of Aurana to a dungeon within these walls."

Faust smiled scornfully.

"You are incredulous, my lord," continued Father Anselm, mistaking the meaning of that smile; "behold the papers to which I refer! I found them in the possession of Gregory Walstein—the husband of your late paramour, Ida!"

And, as he spoke, he drew the documents from beneath his garments.

"I perceive that you hold papers which might seriously compromise me," said Faust, with an indifference which somewhat staggered the prisoner; "and I can readily understand the hopes which you build upon the possession of them. But I fear not the use which you make of

them. With one glance," continued Faust, proudly, "I can shrivel up those papers in your hand—so that scarcely even their very ashes shall remain;—or I can snatch them from you with as much ease as a giant would take an object from the grasp of an infant!"

"Your lordship must suppose that imprisonment has turned my brain, thus to endeavour to intimidate me with such idle vaunts," exclaimed Anselm, in a menacing tone. "It is true that there is much mysterious and marvellous about you; and especially have I ever since been at a loss to divine how you were enabled in the Castle of Saint Angelo to tell the true tale of my escape from the dissecting-room nearly twenty-seven years ago. But I now defy your wild and silly boast!"

"Nay—I boast of no power which is not mine!" said Faust, with the most provoking calmness.

And—strange phenomenon!—while he yet spoke, a lurid glow suddenly spread over the papers which Anselm held in his hand; and in another moment they were entirely consumed.

"Holy Virgin! what sorcery is this?" cried Anselm, profoundly alarmed: then, recollecting himself, he said in a ferocious tone, "I have heard of parchments chemically prepared to pass through certain processes; and alchemy can yield effects that may astonish the vulgar mind. But on me, proud lord, that magic mummery is thrown away; and though you have, by some strange jugglery, destroyed the written proofs of your crime, yet will I proclaim it with my voice if you refuse to procure my freedom. Yes—the Countess of Aurana shall learn that her husband, whom she loved so tenderly, according to all report, was the seducer of Ida, and connived at the murder of his own child! Choose, Faust, between this dread exposure and the little effort that it will cost you to restore me to liberty!"

"I defy you—I scorn you, son of the gibbet!" cried the Count. "Do your worst!"

"You will repent your insolence in thus daring me, Faust," said the prisoner. "The world—ever ready to believe aught that militates against the characters of great men, who are the world's oppressors—will believe my tale. And when, too, it is remembered how mysteriously Ida met her death, will not the tongues of scandal associate that deed with your name? They will say that the Count of Aurana was wearied of his mistress, or afraid of her—and therefore assassinated her!"

"Wretch!" cried Faust. "I have the power to stop those scandal-loving tongues as well as I could now hush thine for ever, did I choose to exercise that power on one so vile as thou!"

"No! your chemical jugglery cannot stifle my voice!" exclaimed Anselm, foaming with rage. "Hither comes the gaoler—I hear him approaching: one word—will you procure an order for my release?"

"Never!" returned Faust; and at that moment the key turned in the door.

"Then will I have no regard for you!" said Anselm; "and the world shall soon know that the Count of Aurana is a mur—"

He ceased, and sank heavily upon the bench which was close behind him—paralyzed by the terrible glance that flashed like lightning from the eyes of Faust.

The door opened.

"You would do well to procure medical assistance for this miserable man," said Faust, calmly; "for methinks he is stricken as with a fit."

"Indeed, my lord," cried the gaoler, approaching the prisoner, whose head had fallen forward upon the table: then, at the expiration of a few moments, the man exclaimed, "He is dead! Ulric Kinis is no more; the devil has got his due at last!"

Faust made no answer, but walked leisurely away from the dungeon.

## CHAPTER LXXVIII.

### OTTO'S RETURN TO LINSDFORD CASTLE.

We shall devote this chapter and the one following it to the narrative of a variety of circumstances, which, when thus disposed of, will enable us to take a leap of several years in the history of the Count of Aurana.

The important discovery of the parentage of the Archduchess Maria was a source of mingled joy and melancholy to herself, her affectionate husband, and their friends. While the certainty of her noble birth and high origin was established on the one hand, the fearful manner of her parents' death was elucidated on the other.

Alas! her generous-hearted father had perished by the dagger of an assassin! and her mother—after languish-

ing for weeks through all the phases of the most intense suffering—had been cut off by the hand of the poisoner!

"Peace be to their remains!" was the lady's fervent prayer.

Of all the individuals interested in this matter the only one who scarcely devoted a thought to the untimely death of Count Sigismund and the Countess Ildegarda—so overjoyed was he at the discovery of the noble parentage of the Archduchess—was the Emperor Maximilian; and from that period his nephew's lovely wife became a greater favourite than ever with the various members of the imperial family.

The sudden death of Father Anselm, or rather of Ulric Kinis—an occurrence which was attributed to a fit produced by excitement and the workings of his evil passions—proved no barrier to the complete establishment of the claims of the Archduchess upon the fief of Linsdorf; inasmuch as the letter of Fritz, the narrative of Father Anselm, the manuscript in the handwriting of the Countess Ildegarda, and a variety of collateral circumstances, formed such a mass of evidence in proof of her noble origin that not even the most astute lawyer could possibly raise a quibble in the case. Moreover, that evidence soon received the most effectual corroboration—the result of a strict scrutiny effected at the Castle of Linsdorf itself. But of this in its place.

The Archduchess Maria was fervent and energetic in her appeal to her husband in behalf of her uncle, Manfred.

"He is the murderer of my parents," she said; "and it is to no sentiment of mercy on his part that I am indebted for my own life. Still he is my relative—my late father's brother!"

"I can appreciate as much as I admire the generous feelings that prompt this intercession on your part, dearest Maria," returned the Archduke Leopold; "but the crimes of that man have been so numerous, so flagrant, so black in dye, that it would be an insult to the laws of the German Empire—an insult also to the throne of my imperial uncle, who is himself the fountain of justice—to allow Manfred of Linsdorf to escape. No, he must be taken prisoner; but his life shall be spared, to enable him to pass the remainder of his days in penitence and penance, to which state of mind the solitude of a dungeon will assuredly lead him.

The Archduchess urged her prayer no farther; and Otto Pianalla set out with a small troop of the imperial guards to effect the arrest of Manfred of Linsdorf.

The party travelled day and night, with the hope of arriving at Kemberg ere the news of Father Anselm's revelations and the important discoveries recently made in respect to Manfred's crimes should have reached that neighbourhood; for Otto knew enough of Manfred's character to be fully convinced that he would shut himself up in his fortress, and defend it to the very last, were he forewarned of the explosion that had taken place and of the storm that was gathering so quickly over his head.

But there were no newspapers in those times; printing was in its infancy; postal means of communication were not in existence; and tidings of events were only circulated by the travellers who passed through the various places on their way.

The reader need not therefore be surprised when we inform him that Otto Pianalla and his band of twelve rickers of the imperial guard did actually reach the Black Swan at Kemberg before the news which so seriously affected the usurper of the broad lands of Linsdorf.

Herman, the landlord of that tavern, was greatly astonished when he recognised Otto Pianalla in the person under whose orders the party of guardsmen were placed; and his surprise was materially augmented when the young artist showed him the rescript of Father Anselm.

"The command shall be obeyed, good Messer Pianalla," said the landlord, respectfully, placing the document to his lips; "but in the name of the Virgin! what does all this mean?"

"Ask no questions, Herman," replied Otto; "but see that the task enjoined thee in that paper be speedily and faithfully performed. Rumour will soon enough enlighten thee in many strange ways. And forgive me for hinting that any cross purpose on your part—any foul play, Herman—will be summarily avenged; for those brave fellows who are now refreshing themselves in the public room, after a long and wearisome journey, are under my command; and should the rescript I have handed to thee be insufficient to urge thee to prompt obedience I arry that authority about me which thou wouldst resist thy peril."

Thus speaking, Otto displayed to the view of the astonished Herman an imperial warrant, granting "full

powers to our tried and faithful servant, the excellent Messer Pianalla, to act as seemeth fit to him in all matters touching the affairs of Manfred of Linsdorf, whilome known as Count of that fief; to make all perquisitions and effect all arrests that may be necessary for the furtherance of the aims of justice; and to obtain the assistance of all local chiefs and district authorities, with their military contingencies, in case of need."

"The rescript of Father Anselm," said Herman, with a pale countenance—for vague fears now oppressed his mind, although he knew not precisely of what danger he was afraid—"is alone sufficient to induce me to act in the manner required.

He would gladly have asked divers questions, but dared not—for Otto's manner was less friendly than it was on the last occasion of his visit to the Black Swan.

Indeed, the young man looked upon Herman with suspicion and aversion, because he now knew him to be a member of that tremendous league which had established a hideous secret despotism throughout Germany.

Herman repaired in person, and without delay, to Linsdorf Castle. It is not necessary to narrate the tale which he devised to induce Manfred to repair with him to the inn; suffice it to say that, after a short absence, he returned to the Black Swan, accompanied by the usurper.

The instant Manfred set foot within the tavern, he was accosted by Otto Pianalla, who said to him, "You are my prisoner! In the name of his Imperial Majesty I arrest you!"

"What means this insolence?" cried Manfred, laying his hand upon his sword.

"Resistance is vain," said Otto, calmly, as he threw open the door of the public room, and pointed to the imperial guards, who were gathered there. "Surrender your sword!"

"Of what crime am I accused?" demanded Manfred, his face becoming livid, as he gave up his weapon.

"I will explain to you in private the causes of your arrest," said Otto.

The fallen man mechanically led the way to the parlour up-stairs, the artist following him closely.

When they were alone together, Pianalla addressed him in an impressive manner—

"Manfred of Linsdorf, you are accused of the murder of your elder brother and his wife, Ildegarda. Providence has brought your crimes to light. The Archduchess Maria is the true Countess of Linsdorf, and you are an usurper of her rights and estates. Your own agents in the blackest turpitude have become the instruments of heaven in unravelling the skein of mystery and atrocity. Hugo and Ulric Kinis—"

"Ulric Kinis—Father Anselm!" cried the prisoner, trembling from head to foot, and scarcely able to utter a word, as these terrible revelations met his ears. "He disappeared from Linsdorf—on the night when Cæsar Borgia escaped with the mute—and—"

"That pretended mute was myself," cried Otto; "and when Ulric Kinis disappeared in a manner which seems to have been so mysterious to yourself he was my prisoner! Since that period he has confessed all—and he is now no more! He died suddenly in the criminal prison of Vienna."

The usurper made no reply; the thunder-cloud had broken over his head with such fearful abruptness—such appalling violence—that he was overwhelmed—crushed—stupefied. The unprincipled, reckless, daring, valiant Manfred of Linsdorf had suddenly become weak, powerless, and prostrate as was Sampson when the charm that gave him strength was removed with his flowing hair.

Otto summoned two of his guards to keep watch over the fallen man, while he departed to accomplish a solemn duty which had been enjoined him, ere he quitted Vienna, by the Archduchess Maria.

The artist, accompanied by half a dozen of the imperial soldiers, hastened to Linsdorf Castle.

Arrived at the gate of that fortress, he said to the astonished sentinels, "Your late master is a prisoner under the warrant of his Majesty the Emperor, and I come to take possession of the castle in the name of its rightful owner, the Archduchess Maria, who is the daughter and heiress of Count Sigismund and the Countess Ildegarda."

Otto then exhibited certain papers which showed his authority thus to act; and the sentinels offered not the slightest resistance.

Upon entering the castle, Otto commanded Dame Winifred to be immediately arrested. When this order was executed, he repaired to the chapel, accompanied by his guards and some of the dependants of the fortress, the

latter of whom were provided with the necessary implements to execute his present purpose.

The family vault of the lords of Linsdorf was soon entered; and Otto, lighted by the torches which his followers bore, searched for the two coffins which had last been deposited in that sanctuary for the dead.

The vault was spacious; upwards of a hundred and fifty male and females who had borne the name of Linsdorf had found a last home in that sepulchre.

The coffins were placed in large receptacles, or arched hollows, along the sides of a vaulted stone passage. In those niches which were nearest to the entrance scarcely a handful of ashes remained; but as the visitors to the tomb proceeded farther into its depths, they found coffins in a better state of preservation.

Solemn and impressive was that lesson of the progressive influence of decomposition and decay!

Towards the end of the vault the coffins were almost perfect—but covered with dust, and producing the sickening impression upon the mind that they only needed one rude touch of a human hand to fall in and display their rotting contents.

At length the last two of the occupied niches were reached.

Over the penultimate were suspended the casque, the shield, and the sword once worn by him whose remains were now yielding to the insect and the worm within the dust-covered coffin.

"These must have been the arms of Count Sigismund of Linsdorf!" said Otto, in a low and solemn tone.

He then ordered those who accompanied him to break open the lid of the last coffin of all in that long row of the decaying ancestry of a noble house.

"Behold!" he said, retreating a few steps to enable his companions to examine it also; "this coffin contains naught but stones and dirt. And yet the words '*Lady Ildegarda, Countess of Linsdorf, and Her Infant Daughter*,' are upon the lid!"

He then ordered his followers to remove the coffin from the vault, empty it of the rubbish it contained, and convey it to the chapel—adding, "it will be required presently."

This important duty being accomplished, the artist repaired with his followers to the tower of the donjon, in which the prison-chamber was situate.

They entered a vault beneath the tower, and the men, who were provided with spades and pickaxes, speedily but carefully dug up the earth.

The others watched them in profound silence; for only Otto and the guards were acquainted with the motives of those proceedings.

At length a skull was turned up; and in a short time a complete set of human bones were gathered from the depths of the soil.

"Those are the remains of the late Countess Ildegarda of Linsdorf," said Otto. "This unfortunate but virtuous lady and her noble husband were basely murdered by command of Manfred, who has so long usurped the estates thus acquired by the blackest crimes."

The retainers of the fallen Count crossed themselves, and exchanged looks of speechless horror.

Otto now ordered the bones to be decently wrapped in a linen shroud and a velvet pall, and placed in the coffin which had been previously removed from the vault to the chapel.

He then despatched a messenger, mounted on a swift horse, with a note to the Baron of Rosenthal; he himself, and the six guardsmen who were with him, taking up their temporary abode at Linsdorf Castle.

Late that evening the Baron of Rosenthal, accompanied by his chaplain, and attended by an escort befitting his rank, arrived at the fortress which had so long been in the hands of his mortal enemy.

The Baron was not particularly astonished when he heard the history of all those strange incidents which had hurled Manfred from his usurped eminence; inasmuch as certain rumours, which had long been current in the district, and the contents of the manuscript which his daughter Theresa had shown him, had more or less aroused in his mind suspicions of the real truth connected with the foul play that had led to Manfred's elevation. But he was profoundly surprised when he learnt from Otto that the same events which led to the exposure of the usurper's crimes had also established the true parentage of the Archduchess Maria, the once obscure and friendless orphan whom the late Baroness had received through charity into Rosenthal.

At midnight a solemn ceremony took place in the chapel of Linsdorf Castle—the remains of the Countess Ildegarda were consigned to the family vault. The

Baron of Rosenthal's chaplain (who had accompanied his noble master to Linsdorf in compliance with a request to that effect expressed in Otto's note to the Baron) performed the funeral service in a solemn and impressive manner. Thus many, many years after it was first made, on the supposition that it was to contain the mortal remains of the Countess, that coffin at length received the ashes of the murdered lady. A new and suitable inscription was placed upon it; and it was then consigned to the niche which it had already occupied for so long a period, and where it had only existed as a solemn mockery until now!

On the following morning Otto prepared for his departure. He had acquitted himself of certain commissions entrusted to him by the Lady Theresa for her father: he had delivered to the Baron the letters which his daughter had sent, in reply to those of which Otto had been the bearer from the Baron to the Countess on the previous occasion of his visit to that neighbourhood. In these letters Theresa assured her father that she was quite happy, and that her husband had lately absented himself from her much less than he had been previously wont to do.

Otto had another commission to execute in respect to the Baron of Rosenthal. This was to deliver into his hands a despatch direct from the Emperor Maximilian. The Baron perused it, and said, "You are doubtless acquainted with the contents of this document?"

"It relates to the Duke of Valentinois and his sister, if I mistake not," returned Otto. "And the mention of their name reminds me that when the Duke escaped from this fortress through my agency he left behind him a dependant—"

"One Michelotto," interrupted the Baron, "whom Manfred set free the very day when you took your departure from Rosenthal, on the occasion of your last visit to this district. The document which his Imperial Majesty has sent me, his faithful servant, commands that the Duke of Valentinois and the Princess Lucrezia be enjoined to quit the German Empire within a reasonable period. I cannot assert that these instructions grieve me," continued the Baron; "for, sooth to say, the Italians are not company to my taste. Ever since the arrival of the Duke, I have lived in constant alarm lest it should please him to subject my life to some chemical test, and drop a little of his peculiar fluid into my cup or mingle one of his powders with my favourite dishes. As for his sister, she turns the heads of my pages; and Michelotto does naught save quarrel with Dewitz on points of military tactics. In a word, good Otto, I shall be well pleased when they turn their backs upon my abode."

With these words the Baron wrung the hand of the artist, and took his departure from Linsdorf.

Otto then proceeded to make the necessary arrangements to establish the officer of the imperial guards, who had accompanied him from Vienna, in the government of the castle, until the further pleasure of the Archduke Leopold should be known. This matter being satisfactorily settled, he repaired to the oratory communicating with the prison-chamber in the donjon, and took charge of the portraits of Count Sigismund and the Countess Ildegarda, for the purpose of conveying them to Vienna.

Having thus accomplished the numerous duties and commissions entrusted to him, Pianalla returned to the Black Swan at Kemberg, attended by two of the imperial guards (the other four remaining behind in charge of the castle). Dame Winifred also accompanied him as his prisoner, and maintained a stubborn silence, her passionless countenance giving no indication of what was passing in her mind. And yet, accused as she was of being an accomplice in the crimes of her late master, her position was far from an enviable one.

Scarcely had the little party reached the gate of the Black Swan when one of the guards who had remained behind to keep watch upon the prisoner Manfred, hastened to encounter the artist, exclaiming, "Oh! Messer Pianalla, he has died in a manner worthy of his life—a death of violence!"

"What?—Manfred?—" exclaimed Otto, impatiently, for a suspicion of the truth instantly flashed across his mind.

"Manfred is no more!" said the soldier. "He had a small but sharp dagger concealed about his person; and ten minutes have not elapsed since he inflicted a sudden and mortal blow upon himself!"

Otto hastened to the room where he had left Manfred on the preceding day; and one glance was sufficient for him to read in the spectacle that met his eyes a sad confirmation of the words of the soldier.



The once proud and powerful Count of Linsdorf was no more!

## CHAPTER LXXIX.

### A LAPSE OF FIFTEEN YEARS.

OTTO PIANALLA, the eight guards who returned with him, and his prisoner Winifred, arrived at Vienna in the month of November. This it must be remembered occurred in the year 1497.

Having lodged the female accomplice of the late Count's crimes in the criminal prison, he proceeded to the palace of the Archduke, and was received by that prince and the beautiful Maria with the most cordial welcome.

He narrated the particulars of all that had occurred at Linsdorf Castle and Kemberg; and the tears of the Archduchess flowed fast as he described in the most delicate manner possible, the proceedings in the vault, the exhumation of the bones beneath the donjon tower, and the subsequent funeral. Then he presented to her the portraits which he had brought with great care from Linsdorf; and the orphan daughter's grief was diminished by the consolatory thought of possessing those representations of her deceased parents.

Though a mere combination of colours upon pieces of canvas, yet how eloquently did the eyes, the lips, and the lofty foreheads of those portraits speak to her who now contemplated them with a melancholy pleasure and a holy resignation!

And when she turned towards Leopold, and beheld his eyes affectionately fixed upon her, she felt that although she had never known the tender cares of a father or mother, yet that the love of a husband was a blessing which God had vouchsafed her, and which Heaven had given her as a recompense for the past!

Dame Winifred was brought to trial in due course, upon a charge of having served as the accomplice of the late Count Manfred in the captivity and murder of the Lady Ildegarda. She maintained her usual apathetic demeanour in the presence of the judges, and neither acknowledged nor denied her guilt. Nor did her countenance vary a single shade when she heard herself condemned to imprisonment in a convent for the remainder of her days.

We must now rapidly dispose of a few events—which are not, however, unimportant—in order to clear the way so as to enable us to take a leap with respect to time, which will bring us to the most strange and interesting portion of our narrative.

In the first place let us say a few words relative to Otto Pianalla.

The great services which he had performed, and the active part he had taken in establishing the true parentage of the Archduchess Maria—the friendship with which he was now regarded by the Archduke—the interest excited in his favour by his amiable qualities, his faultless character, and his generous nature—and the fame which he had also acquired by his dauntless conduct in effecting the rescue of the Baron of Czernin from a captivity until then hopeless—all these circumstances combined to render the Emperor most anxious to honour and reward so deserving a young man.

But Otto firmly, though respectfully, refused alike title and pension. He declared that no bread was so sweet as that which was earned by activity and diligence; and he possessed a far more extensive range of patronage as an artist than he had ever hoped to acquire, or whose orders he could ever meet. For all the great nobles of Vienna and the neighbourhood were anxious to secure paintings at the hands of one who not only enjoyed the friendship of the Archduke Leopold and the favour of the Court, but who was also endowed with talents of the highest order in his particular department.

Otto did not, however, immediately commence his professional avocations in Vienna. No: he first absented himself for a few months: he once more traversed Carniola, and crossed the Julian Alps into Italy. And when he returned to the German metropolis in the spring of 1498, he came not back alone!

Nina Mazzini, the daughter of the humble Italian peasant who accompanied him during his memorable adventures in the Julian Alps, had become his bride.

Then, with his young and lovely wife, he established himself in Vienna, and soon justified by his paintings the high opinion formed of his first productions as an artist. He grew rich rapidly; and he did not refuse the wealth that he thus acquired by his own exertions. But wealth in his hands was a general blessing; for where there was

want in the German capital thither would flow succour from his purse! At the palace of the Archduke and the mansion of the Baron of Czernin both himself and his wife were ever welcome guests; and though but little cordiality existed between him and Faust, yet Theresa experienced the most sincere friendship for the generous Otto and the pretty Nina.

It was at the beginning of the year 1504 that the Baron of Rosenthal was gathered to his fathers. He had been sojourning for upwards of six months at the mansion of the Count and Countess of Aunara; and he died in the arms of his daughter, after a short but fatal illness.

Thus the fief of Rosenthal passed into the hands of the Count and Countess of Aunara.

The same year was signalised by an event which we must place on record here. Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Valentinois, after a series of vicissitudes and a variety of wanderings in different countries, was taken prisoner by the Spaniards. He was consigned to a fortress in Seville, where he was severely treated by the governor. Impatient of this tyranny the Duke resolved to effect his escape. One day he requested the attendance of a priest, being anxious, as he declared, to confess his numerous crimes. A monk accordingly waited upon him; Cæsar killed him with a blow of his fist, took the cowl from the body of the murdered man, put it on himself, drew the hood over his face, and escaped without molestation.

But Cæsar did not ensure his freedom by this atrocious deed for any length of time. Deprived of the services of his faithful Michelotto, from whom he had been accidentally separated some time before, he appeared to have lost half his cunning qualities. He knew not how to secure by skill the liberty he had acquired by violence. He was speedily recaptured, and conveyed to the strong fortress of Medina-del-Campo.

There he languished for two years, forgotten by all his former friends. Kings had once sought his friendship: he was now a neglected captive. No, not altogether neglected: he had one faithful adherent left! This was Michelotto, who discovered the place of his master's imprisonment, and determined to enable him to escape.

Accordingly, one morning in the year 1506, Cæsar received an intimation of the presence of his faithful sbirro in the neighbourhood. On breaking the leaf placed upon his breakfast-table, the Duke found a file and a small bottle. These two articles were sufficient for Cæsar Borgia. He used the file upon the bars of his window during the day; and in the evening Don Manuel, the governor of the fortress, appeared as usual to sup with the Prince, to whom he had conceived an attachment. The contents of the phial were poured into the governor's cup at a moment when his head was turned; and in a few minutes Don Manuel was no more!

Cæsar hastened to form a rope by cutting up his blankets, sheets, and table linen, and ere midnight he joined his faithful dependant outside the walls of Medina-del-Campo.

Michelotto had horses in readiness; and by their aid the Duke, accompanied by his dependant, gained the frontiers of Navarre, and was kindly received by John D'Albert, the king of that country.

In the year 1507, Prince Alarino, one of the vassals of the King of Navarre, revolted against his sovereign; and Borgia took the command of the troops against the insurgent force. A conflict ensued at some place, the name of which is not recorded in history, but which is not far distant from a little village called Viana; and the Duke of Valentinois was slain. His faithful Michelotto immediately assumed the command of the Navarrese, and well avenged the death of his beloved master upon the rebels.

Thus perished Cæsar Borgia, on the 10th of March, 1507, in an insignificant contest with the insurgent vassals of a petty prince, and on a field whose name is forgotten! *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

Lucreza Borgia married the Duke of Ferrara, and took up her abode in that beautiful city.

We shall meet her again the course of the ensuing portion of our tale.

Our narrative had reached the end of November, 1497, at the commencement of this chapter. We have briefly related the leading incidents of some subsequent epochs; but from the first mentioned date we are about to take a long—long leap of fifteen years.

This will bring us nearly to the close of the year 1512.

Nineteen years of the period which had formed so dread a condition in the compact between the Demon and Faust had therefore passed away—nineteen years of love, pleasure, power, and luxury!

Five years now only remained to him!

## CHAPTER LXXX.

## THE LOVERS.

It was verging to the close of the year 1512.

In one of the magnificent saloons of the mansion of Aurana a youth and a maiden were seated.

The former was tall, straight as a dart, and, though slender, of such admirable symmetry that he might have served the sculptor as a model for an Adonis. His countenance was somewhat effeminate, but strikingly handsome; his dark chestnut hair clustered above the white temples; his hazel eyes were large, and soft in expression, but full of intellect; his mouth was small, and the short upper lip was fuller in its redness than the lower one; and the chin was so finely rounded as to complete the oval shape of that countenance of classical perfection.

He had neither whiskers nor moustache; and yet his appearance was not positively effeminate nor even boyish; for there was an expression of thought and reflection—perhaps a little akin to melancholy—which imparted to his features a certain air of manliness and decision.

The maiden who sat by his side was one of the loveliest of God's creatures. She also was tall; and her sylph-like figure was the perfection of feminine grace and beauty. Her blue eyes, when she was in a contemplative or serious mood, were placid yet tender; but when animated by lively emotions, a glorious light seemed suddenly to illumine their depths, and then they shone upon the beholder like twin-stars. Her hair, of the deepest brown, was parted over a brow so fair, so white, so smooth, that the delicate azure veins were traceable beneath the transparent skin.

In the far-off islands of the southern seas there is a fruit called the *arta*—a fruit that grows only in the sunniest valleys, and which, when cut in twain, displays the milk-white seeds reposing in rows on either side, set as it were in the rich red juicy pulp. In like manner did the rosy mouth of this fair young maiden reveal, in smiles, teeth of the most dazzling whiteness.

And the expression of her countenance—oh! this was a heavenly amiability which, in the human sphere, can alone be found depicted in the face of the loveliest and gentlest of virgins. No coquette—no vain, capricious being was she: those graceful movements—that sweet arching of the neck—and every gesture which enhanced the charms of her person—all were alike unstudied. Artless and ingenuous was she: truth was in all her actions as in all her words; and when her loveliness was the most dazzling, she was ever the least conscious of the impression which her beauty thus produced.

That elegant youth and this sweet maiden were precisely of the same age—a few months past eighteen. They were born in the same hour—almost at the same moment—and yet they were not twins, neither were they in the slightest degree related to each other.

But they hoped to be—and that too, shortly; for they were lovers.

And the love which they entertained for each other was of the purest description—a love without selfishness, without reference to the sense—a love that linked their hearts in the bonds of the chastest affection.

Never was that love interrupted by even an angry word: they never quarrelled, as lovers often do, for the sake of the pleasures of reconciliation. Upon his handsome countenance a frown was never seen; nor did her rosy lips ever pout at deed or word on the part of him. They knew not the sentiment of jealousy otherwise than by name; for, judging by their own feelings, they were each convinced that the other was faithful and sincere.

When at the glittering assemblies of rank and beauty at which they were compelled by their social position to be often present, the youth might tread a measure with any of Vienna's charming ladies, or the maiden might accept the hand of any of Vienna's handsome cavaliers, neither that youth nor that maiden expressed by mantling blush or reproachful glance, the slightest sign of dissatisfaction. They were sensible enough to know that the exigencies of fashion must be obeyed and the custom of social life adhered to; and they danced or conversed with their acquaintances because such was the habit of the sphere in which they moved, and for an adhesion to which they were incapable of the injustice involved in mutual reproach. So pure were their thoughts, that it was impossible for them to view with displeasure each other's guileless actions.

And how blest were they in such a love as this?

From their infancy they had been constant companions, though not habitually dwelling beneath the same roof. When only two years old, and still unable to express their

little wants or thoughts in words, they played together—seldom quarrelling, and ever anxious to dry each other's tears. If one wept, the other was sure to weep also; and with their little frocks would they wipe, even at that tender age, each other's eyes.

As they grew older, this affection increased. When they were four or five, their artless prattle was always of the most endearing kind between them: and they would ramble in the gardens of the Archducal palace at Vienna or of the mansion of Aurana, with their arms round each other's necks, and holding each other's little hands. And then, too, the boy would gather the sweetest flowers or pluck the nicest fruit for his fair companion; but, even at that age, they never chased the painted butterfly, nor sought to imprison the innocent bird. They would turn aside to avoid treading upon the poor worm; their hands never ravaged the nest of the thrush, nor of the linnet in the green bush.

Again, as they grew older still, their attachment developed itself in many touching and artless ways. When they wandered in the fields, the boy would carefully lead his companion along the most even and cleanly path; or he would take her in his arms and carry her over the muddy pool or the patches of rough shingle. He selected a sunny bank whereon they might rest; and he gathered flowers, which the girl wove into chaplets, and which he placed upon her glossy hair. Then how joyous was their laughter!—how sweetly musical were their blythe voices, sounding like silver bells over the sunny meadows, and mingling with the gentle babbling of the limpid rivulet.

Time wore on—and the season of study was also passed together. They never could learn well, unless aiding and assisting each other in their tasks. But, sooth to say, it was more often the youth who was the expounder of those difficulties which the young girl encountered in her lessons, than the contrary.

Thus, born in the same hour, they were companions from their birth. At first their love was that artless attachment which unites the hearts of two amiable children: then, as they grew up, it gradually assumed a complexion more tender and ardent, but not the less pure; until, at length, its true nature gradually revealed itself to their minds. The youth discovered the secret first; and, with that ingenuousness which from the very beginning characterised all the details and incidents of their connection, he revealed what he felt to his companion. They compared their sentiments, and discovered them to be the same; and as naturally as if there never were in this world any motives of opposition to the holy union of those who loved, they said to each other, "Our parents will allow us to marry; and then we need never be separated."

Fortunately for them, those whom they deemed their parents could offer no positive objection to a marriage which, of all that ever took place in this world, seemed to be the most fit and the best calculated to ensure the happiness of the young pair. We say that no positive objection was started, because no ostensible one could possibly exist. Still there was one individual whose leave had to be asked and obtained, but who ever evaded the subject when applied to. Not that he started any motive for this hesitation—not that he sought to separate the young couple: no—but he had private reasons, of a wild and fearful nature, for the course which he adopted.

That handsome youth was Maximilian, who was in reality the son of Faust and Theresa, but who from his birth had been taught to regard the Archduke Leopold and Maria as his parents—and that beautiful maiden was Adela, the daughter of the Archduke and Maria, but who from her birth also had been led to look on Faust and Theresa as her father and mother.

And it was Faust himself who was in no hurry to see the hands of the youthful pair united in matrimonial bonds; for were he to permit the ceremony to take place, no apology would be deemed sufficient to account for his absence;—and yet his compact with the Demon stipulated that he should not enter a sacred fane or place of holy worship, to perform therein any rite or ceremony, without the fiend's consent—under penalty of giving that fiend immediate and full power over him!

Such was the state of the lovers' hopes and prospects towards the close of 1512, when we find them sitting together in one of the saloons of the Aurana mansion.

It was verging towards the hour of sunset.

Maximilian took the maiden's hand, and, leading her to the casement, said, "Let us contemplate that fine spectacle, beloved Adela. How often, when we were very young, have we ascended the hill yonder to gaze upon the

same scene! And young—very young though we be still,—yet how often have we seen that grove whereon the departing beams are playing, drop its leaves, remain naked and bare for weeks as it now seems, and then resume the verdure of spring again! Human hopes are shed like those leaves; but the tree of life never buds with them more!"

"You are melancholy this evening, dear Maximilian," said the maiden, endeavouring to read with her own melting blue eyes in the depths of the intelligent hazel orbs of her lover.

"No, dearest; but this is a solemn hour," returned the young Prince; "and when darkness comes gradually on, it appears to steal with a melancholy—and even a foreboding influence over the soul."

"Foreboding!" repeated Adela. "Oh! why should you use that word? If the darkness fall upon the earth and remain there for a few hours, does it not yield to the dawn again? And in like manner, if a cloud envelope the soul, does not heaven sooner or later send the blessed rays of its own bright hopes to dispel that temporary gloom?"

At this moment the folding-doors were thrown open; domestics entered with lights; Maximilian and Adela withdrew from the window, on which the curtains were immediately drawn by those dependants: and in a few minutes afterwards the Archduke Leopold, Faust, the Archduchess, and Theresa entered the room.

## CHAPTER LXXXI.

### THE APPEAL ON BEHALF OF THE LOVERS.

FIFTEEN years had worked little difference in the appearance of the Count of Anrana.

His face was handsome as when it first made an impression upon the heart of Theresa; not a streak of grey was apparent in his chestnut hair; nor was the light dimmed in his blue eyes. His form was still slender, graceful, and upright; but on his brow there was a line—almost imperceptible, it is true—nevertheless, there was a line traced by the finger of care upon that high and intelligent forehead.

He had suffered much—even if he had enjoyed intervals of voluptuous delight and luxurious pleasure, for we cannot give the name of "happiness" to those sensual gratifications which he sought in order to drown awhile the one dread conviction that weighed upon him like a curse!

He was still young—in the prime and vigour of life; and yet he knew that in a few short years he must die—he must meet his fate—and what a death—what a fate!

Roman history tells us of an emperor who was accustomed to exclaim "I have lost a day!" whenever he had passed from sunrise to sunset without performing a good action. And Faust also thought that he had lost a day, when he had allowed that interval to elapse without tasting some new pleasure—without discovering some new enjoyment.

Oh! how he now grudged every hour of his existence; how eagerly did he reckon every day—every week—every month that remained to him in this life! Fain would he have fled from the harrowing thought of his approaching doom; but it pursued him—as a remorse haunts the murderer! Never did miser count his gold with more avarice nor dote it out more niggardly, than Faust now dealt with his time. Time to him was everything; its lapse was pregnant with fearful warnings and terrible reflections.

By means of the superhuman powers within his grasp, he was enabled to enjoy much varied pleasure and debauchery, without palpably neglecting his wife. A word transported him to the far-off places of the earth, where he indulged for a few hours, or a few days, in all the sensual delights of those climes; and a word brought him home again—quicker—oh! how much more quickly than the passage of the eagle through the realms of space.

But though Theresa suspected not the infidelities of which he was guilty, and never had seen the least cause to suspect the nature of the voluptuous pursuits in which he plunged so constantly—still she was far from being completely happy. She had perceived for years that some secret weighed upon her husband's soul: his feverish dreams by night, and his fits of black moodiness by day, convinced her that, in spite of his boundless prosperity, his immense wealth, and the honours heaped upon him by the Court, he was not tranquil in his mind.

Moreover, she observed that he never prayed—that he never attended a place of worship—and that his countenance suddenly assumed an expression of ineffable agony whenever he was questioned upon that subject.

With the affection of a wife, she had endeavoured to learn the cause of those fits of mental oppression which

often seized upon him; with the sincerity of a Christian she had urged him to pour forth his soul to the Deity:—but he had met her questions and her prayers with such strange and unintelligible aversion, that years had now elapsed since she had ventured to touch upon those subjects.

Still she thought not the less—her meditations were not the less painful; but, careful to avoid wounding the feelings of her husband and her friends, she retained her sorrows in her own breast, and endeavoured to conceal their existence beneath a smiling countenance.

With her the lapse of fifteen years had displayed its effects far more than on her husband. But then he would have become gray—bowed—and decrepit, long ere his prime, with the weight of the curse that lay upon his soul, had it not been for the superhuman power which he had purchased so dearly.

Theresa was still beautiful; but her countenance was pale, and even careworn; and her form had wasted, rather than expanded, with maturity.

The Archduke had grown into what would be called in these times a very fine man—somewhat stout withal, but retaining the symmetry of his person and the handsome cast of his countenance.

Maria had expanded from the beautiful girl into the splendid woman; and time sat lightly upon her.

We must not forget to observe that the two mothers had never been able to conquer that preference which each felt for the child (as they supposed) of the other—a preference that commenced so soon after the births of Maximilian and Adela! As the children grew up, that predilection increased, and was a source of great discomfort alike to Theresa and Maria. They often spoke of it in secret; they mingled their tears together when they discoursed on feelings to them incomprehensible; and they reproached themselves for a natural demonstration of affection, the true springs of which were unsuspected by them.

They had, however, two sources of solace in respect to this interchange of sentiments; for an interchange did it appear to them—inasmuch as Theresa fancied that she loved Maria's son better than her own daughter, and on her side Maria believed that her heart yearned more towards Theresa's daughter than to her own son.

Those sources of solace were the representations of the priests to whom they confessed themselves, and the hope that the marriage of Maximilian and Adela might as it were render the predilection above alluded to somewhat more legitimate in the eyes of the mothers respectively. The priests—two excellent and well-meaning men—assured both Theresa and Maria that God had created within them, and for his own wise and mysterious purposes, the feelings of preference in respect to the children; and these representations were sufficient to impart much consolation to women deeply imbued with a sense of the religion in which they had been brought up.

Having recorded these few observations, which were necessary to explain some of the effects of the lapse of fifteen years that has occurred in our narrative, we will now proceed with the thread of the history.

The party whom we left in the splendid saloon at Anrana mansion—namely, the Archduke and Archduchess, Faust and Theresa, Maximilian and Adela,—seated themselves at the table, on which the domestics placed wines, cake, confectionery, and preserves.

The servants then withdrew; for, on these occasions, friendly conversation displaced cold ceremony, and those who formed the little party chose not to be embarrassed by the presence of dependants.

"Believe me, Count," said the Archduke, resuming the thread of a discourse which had been commenced in another apartment ere the parents joined the young lovers,— "believe me, Count, that you entertain unnecessary scruples in delaying the happiness of our children. You imagine that they are yet too young to be united. Will you maintain that they do not know their own minds?—that they are incapable of judging of their own hearts?"

Maximilian and Adela exchanged tender glances as these words met their ears; but at the same time their countenances were suffused with blushes.

"Behold them!" continued the Archduke, smiling; "did you ever know more fervent attachment? My dear friend, they seem as if they were made for each other."

"They have been constant companions since their birth," said the Archduchess, "and their friendship has ripened into a more earnest feeling. I beseech you, my lord, not to place a barrier in the way of their happiness."

And as she thus spoke, Maria looked tenderly at the lovers; but her glance dwelt longer upon the countenance of Adela.

"Wilhelm," observed Theresa, taking up the argument in her turn, "you cannot resist these appeals. His Imperial Highness confers an honour upon us by so earnestly pressing the union of his son with our daughter; and the sincere friendship which has now so long existed between the two families will be cemented and strengthened—if possible—by the ties of relationship thus created. I beseech you, Wilhelm, not to delay a ceremony that will render those children happy."

And Theresa looked fondly at the lovers as she spoke; but her glance dwelt longer upon the countenance of Maximilian.

"For my part," exclaimed the Archduke, "I cannot perceive how you can possibly refuse our united requests, my dear Count. At the same time, I respect your scruples as a father; but I consider them to be unfounded. The fortunes of our children are assured; they will enter upon their experience of the great world under circumstances the most favourable; and the usual arguments that militate against youthful marriages apply not in this case. If our appeals to you be not sufficient, then glance at that fond pair—read in their eyes the attachment they bear towards each other—and let them, if it be necessary, plead their own cause. It was for this purpose I proposed ere now that we should join them here: it is with this view that I have discussed the subject thus frankly in their presence."

The youthful lovers knelt at the feet of Faust, who had listened in silence, but not without deep emotion, to the appeals thus made to him.

He was cruelly embarrassed.

To refuse the request of the Archduke, who sought an alliance with his family, would be to insult the good prince;—to find substantial excuses for further delay was impossible.

And there, too, were the lovers now kneeling before him, and turning their blushing countenances up to him in a manner that none could resist without the imputation of unnecessary cruelty. Moreover, Faust loved his son tenderly—that son whom he dared not claim as such!

"Rise, Adela—rise, Maximilian," he exclaimed, driven almost to desperation; "to-morrow, at mid-day, I will give you my answer; and this short delay I must crave from the friendship of the Archduke."

With these words the Count rose abruptly from his chair and left the room—unable any longer to subdue those feelings which agitated him so profoundly.

"Holy Virgin! what can thus unsettle my husband?" cried Theresa. "I will follow him—he may be ill!"

And she hurried from the apartment.

## CHAPTER LXXXII.

### FAUST AND THERESA.

FAUST rushed along the lofty and well-lighted passage from which the principal saloons of the mansion opened; his brain was whirling;—the glare of the brilliant lamps seemed to madden him.

At that moment he felt as if utter darkness and solitude would be most congenial to his mind; he revolted from the reflection of his own person in the mirrors which graced that magnificent corridor. He loathed himself!

Hastily turning from the passage, and-unaware that he was followed, he entered an apartment where there was no light; and throwing himself on the sofa, exclaimed aloud, "Wretch!—wretch that I am! Oh! never did I feel the horrors of my criminal condition so acutely as now!"

Theresa had followed him; she was about to speak to him—to implore him to say what secret grief oppressed him, just at the moment when those words, so strange and terrible in their emphatic self-accusation, fell upon her ears.

As if a thunderbolt had suddenly fallen near her, she sank upon her knees, and, joining her hands together, prayed in silence.

The room was spread with a thick carpet in which the feet sank deeply; and Theresa's movements were therefore inaudible to her husband, who remained totally unconscious of her presence.

His mind, moreover, was in such a state of distraction and despair—a prey to feelings of so agonizing a nature—that even had she sunk heavily upon an uncarpeted floor, it was not likely he would have noticed the sound.

Theresa did not wish to play the part of an eaves-dropper; she would have scorned—spurned such an idea, had she been capable of tranquil reflection—but those terrific and mysterious words—the more terrific because so mysterious—that fell upon her ear, stifled all that she was about to utter—paralysed her—almost prostrated her.

"Yes," continued Faust, still speaking aloud—and it was evident by his enunciation that he ground his teeth with bitter anguish as he spoke—"I am a wretch—the veriest wretch that crawls upon the face of the earth! The meanest beggar, grovelling in his rags and wallowing in filth, is happier than the Count of Aurana. Happier—oh! ten thousand—thousand times happier than I;—and would that I could exchange conditions with him! What am I to do? how am I to act? I am distracted! And not a friend—no, not a friend whom I can consult—to whom I may impart the dread secret of my fate! Must my terrible destiny involve in mystery all who connect themselves with me?—must I cause the wretchedness of that youthful pair—so fond—so attached? And yet how can I assent to their nuptials—I, who dare not be present at the ceremony! Oh! that I could recall the past—that I could undo all that is done! Ah! Theresa—Theresa, thou knowest not how fearful was the sacrifice that I made to gain thee!"

"My dear—dearest husband!" murmured a sweet voice in his ear; and at the same instant warm arms were thrown round his neck—a face touched his—and hot tears fell upon his cheeks.

"Theresa! is this you?" cried Faust, grasping her arms with convulsive violence, and speaking in a tone which denoted horror and dismay.

"Yes, Wilhelm, I have heard all!" murmured Theresa; "and now I know that you are unhappy!"

"All!" exclaimed Faust, disengaging himself from her embrace, and starting frantically to his feet: "all!—you have heard all! But what have you heard?—for I know not what I said; I was mad—distracted! Speak, Theresa—speak!" he added, violently; "what have you heard?"

"That you are unhappy—that your fate is a terrible one—that you dare not permit the nuptials of those dear children, because you cannot be present at the ceremony—and that I know not how fearful a sacrifice you made to gain me!"

Theresa uttered these sentences with strange rapidity and alarming vehemence of manner.

"And that was all!" cried Faust. "I said no more; I mentioned no cause of unhappiness—I—"

"You said no more," returned Theresa, whose throat was parched, and whose voice sounded thick and even hoarse, that voice usually so harmonious: "you said no more, Wilhelm—but, oh! how terrible were those words to which you gave utterance. Tell me—tell me, I conjure you—as your wife, I implore you—tell me the cause of your unhappiness—reveal to me the secret which makes your fate terrible!"

And she clung to him—she wound her arms round him—as she spoke; her grief was dreadful!

Faust hesitated: he was touched—deeply touched by this demonstration of profound attachment on the part of his wife. He had never ceased to love her entirely; and he now felt how sweet it would be to receive consolation from one who was so sincerely devoted to him.

"No—no—it is impossible!" he exclaimed aloud, in answer to the evanescent promptings of his soul. "Theresa—ask me no more—I implore you! I dare not confide in you!"

"Refuse me not—keep not secret any longer the source of your unhappiness!" cried Theresa. "Am I not worthy of your confidence? do I not love you? have I not ever loved you since first we met? Oh! believe me, Wilhelm, my heart has undergone no change in respect to you, for you are as dear to me as ever!"

"Theresa, you will drive me mad!" ejaculated Faust, endeavouring to break away from her.

"No, you shall not leave me thus!" she cried—nay, almost screamed, as she clung more tightly to him than before: "I cannot live in that state of suspense to which you would condemn me by your silence! For years I have seen that you were unhappy—and I have wept in secret; I have not obtruded my grief upon you. But now—now that you have dropped words of such fearful but mysterious import—now that I have learnt from your own lips that some spell controls your destiny—oh! do not leave me in doubt and uncertainty—lest I imagine things even more horrible than the truth can possibly be."

"All your imaginings could not conceive things more horrible than that truth, Theresa!" said Faust, in a low and hollow tone, which sounded awfully and ominously in the utter darkness of that apartment.

"Holy Virgin! what do you mean?" cried Theresa, with a shudder. "And why do you start so convulsively at the ejaculation which terror wrung from me? Oh! Wilhelm, are sacred names abhorrent to your ears?"

"No—no!" exclaimed Faust, with wild impatience;

"but mention them not! Let me begone, Theresa—let me go!"

And again he struggled to escape from her; but she clung with impassioned tenacity to his neck.

"We must not separate thus—we must not separate yet," she said, in a low and more collected tone than before. "It would be a horrible cruelty on your part to leave me in this state of doubt and fearful suspense. It would drive me mad! Whatever the truth be, confide in me—in your wife! If you be unfortunate, cannot I console you? And if you be criminal, cannot I pray for you?"

"Theresa—Theresa—you know not what you say!" cried Faust. "Pray for me!—thou wouldst pray for me! Why—the mere words would blister thy tongue!" And he laughed hysterically.

"Oh! Wilhelm—now you frighten me more than ever!" shrieked Theresa. "That laugh—my God! what meant that fearful laugh? Say—why did you laugh as if in mockery at the idea of prayer? You do not answer me: there is something more terrible in your silence than even in your laugh! Why should I not pray for you? Do not make me think that some dreadful crime weighs upon your soul! But if you be indeed guilty, there is hope of mercy for every mortal sinner!"

"Theresa, enough of this!" said Faust, in a rapid, but determined tone. "Your kindness has touched me—deeply touched me; but I dare not reveal my secret to you! No—do not ask me again: I dare not—I dare not!"

With these words, he effectually released himself from her embrace.

She tottered and fell back fainting upon the sofa; and Faust hurried from the room.

He hastened into the gardens, and sought the chill air to cool his heated brain.

In a few minutes he grew more composed, and began to consider seriously what course he should pursue.

He loved his own son Maximilian: he was also to some degree attached to Adela, who had been brought up from infancy as his daughter. She was ever fond, amiable, and endearing towards him, whom she believed to be her father; and lost, deprived as he was, he still possessed a heart on which such innocent outpourings of love and gratitude produced a deep impression. Anxious, therefore, was he to ensure the happiness of those youthful lovers; for he entertained but little fear of being enabled to save his son—his only son—from that terrible doom to which he had consented to yield up his first-born.

In the deep embarrassment in which Faust was placed, and in which he could obtain no assistance from the Demon—unless, perhaps, it were at the sacrifice of some portion of the little time yet remaining to him in this life—he felt the want of some true and sincere friend to advise and assist him.

In this strait he suddenly thought of Otto Pianalla.

The artist was honourable and intelligent; and Faust knew no one more capable of affording him counsel and aid than that individual, who, by his integrity and industry, had become wealthy and eminent.

Without farther hesitation or delay did the Count of Anrana address himself to Otto Pianalla.

The particulars of the interview between those human types of good and evil will be found in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER LXXXIII.

#### FAUST AND OTTO PIANALLA.

WE must now introduce our readers to an apartment in a moderate-sized house situate in one of the most healthy, though by no means the most fashionable quarters of Vienna.

That room was furnished in a plain but comfortable manner; and the air of cleanliness which manifested itself as well as the taste with which the few ornaments were disposed denoted the attention of a careful and judicious housewife.

There were several excellent pictures suspended to the walls. One represented a man of noble appearance and a beautiful lady in an Oriental costume, the latter fondling a charming infant upon her knees. On the lower part of the frame was the date of 1498, which showed when the picture was painted; and that representation of domestic felicity contained the portraits of the Baron and Baroness of Czernin and the only but much-loved pledge of their affection.

A second picture delineated, with admirable fidelity, the likeness of the Archduke Leopold and the Archduchess Maria; a third contained the portrait of Nina, Otto Pianalla's wife, with two rosy-cheeked children clinging fondly to her knees; and on the canvas of a fourth

were traced the countenances of Maximilian and Adela. The second and third pictures bore the dates of 1503; but the last had been executed at a later period—in the year 1511,—and represented the subjects of its portraiture in the youthful glory of their beauty.

Seated at a table in this apartment, and instructing his two sons—now respectively twelve and thirteen years old—in the necessary elements of education, was Otto Pianalla. The lapse of time had worked no change in his outward appearance—unless it were to stamp upon his countenance an air of settled and calm contentment, which was the reflection of his mind.

Happy and blest he indeed was;—happy, because he was virtuous,—and blest in the prosperity of his career and the affections of his amiable wife and charming children!

It was upwards of an hour past sunset; and, the lessons being terminated, the two youths and the happy father repaired to another room, where Nina had been superintending the arrangements of the supper-table. When her husband and children entered the apartment where the evening meal was served, she received them with a sweet smile—for the most sincere affection for each other characterised all the members of that contented and virtuous family. Then the children hastened to embrace an elderly man who was already seated at the board, and called him "grandfather." Such, too, he really was; for this was Mazzini, whom Otto had induced to abandon his Italian cottage, and take up his abode at the artist's own house in Vienna, so that he might not be separated from his daughter—his only child!

The happy family sat down to supper; but the meal was interrupted by the entrance of a servant to inform his master that the Count of Anrana requested a private interview with him. The servant added that the Count was waiting for Messer Pianalla in the apartment to which we are now introduced our readers.

Thither Otto Pianalla accordingly repaired—not a little surprised at a visit from one with whom he had no sympathy, and whom he must ever look upon as the seducer and destroyer of his sister.

Faust was pacing the room with agitated steps, when Otto entered it; and the moment the artist made his appearance, the Count accosted him abruptly, saying, "Messer Pianalla, you must marvel to see me here! But can you forget the past and serve me as a friend—as a sincere friend, such as you have proved yourself to others—such as your own good heart ever prompts you to be?"

"There breathes not a human being whom I would refuse to succour to the extent of my humble means," answered Otto Pianalla. "Had I a mortal enemy in the world, and did he cross my threshold to ask my aid in any way, I should proffer him the hand of friendship; for such a course I conceive to be a Christian duty."

"I did not expect less at your hands," cried Faust; "and yet it must be a cruel embarrassment that could induce me to address myself to you; for I am well aware—"

"Speak not of the past," my lord," interrupted Otto, emphatically. "Even were I not disposed to serve you for your own sake, nevertheless I should gladly aid you for the sake of your amiable Countess and your daughter, for whom I entertain the sincerest friendship."

"It is precisely because you do thus respect them, and because you are acquainted with so much of all that concerns myself and them," returned Faust, "that I have now sought you. I know also, sir, that you are a man of the strictest honour; and that no syllable of aught which may now pass between us, will ever be revealed by you to others."

"Proceed, my lord," said Otto: "whatever you may communicate to me shall be deemed sacred."

"You are aware," continued Faust, after a short pause, during which he appeared to hesitate whether he should say more, or not,— "you are aware that a profound attachment exists between Maximilian, the Archduke's son, and Adela, my daughter."

Otto pointed to the picture in which the portraits of the young lovers were painted on the same canvas.

"Ah! it is indeed life-life!" exclaimed Faust, who had never seen the picture before, but who now examined it for a few moments with deep attention and interest. "Yes—even as you have depicted them, do they ever look lovingly on each other! And it is of them that I must now speak—it is their happiness which at present occupies my mind."

"And to which happiness there can be no possible barrier, my lord," said Otto.

"Yes—there is, there is a barrier—a formidable barrier, Messer Pianalla!" exclaimed Faust; "and it is I who



have been compelled to place it in the way of that young, beautiful, and affectionate pair."

"You, my lord!" cried the artist, in astonishment. "Surely the union of your lordship's daughter with the heir to the name, rank, and wealth of the Archduke Leopold of Austria, must be one that finds favour in your eyes!"

"How can I view it in any other light?" demanded Faust, impatiently. "But it is my own destiny, Otto—my own fearful destiny which places in the way of those dear children's happiness the obstacle whereof I have spoken!"

"I cannot understand the meaning of your lordship's words," said Otto. "They contain an enigma to me incomprehensible; for, wealthy as you are—great and powerful as you are—"

"I know it all," interrupted Faust, more impatiently than before: "still I am not my own master! A terrible destiny enchains—enthals me;—a dreadful fate compels me to pursue a certain career, and menaces the happiness of all connected with me!"

"This is strange—so strange that it fills my mind with vague suspicions," exclaimed Otto; "and yet I know not to what precise point those suspicions definitely verge! Speak, my lord: if you are unhappy, I will endeavour to console you;—if you be unfortunate, I will essay to assist you;—if you be criminal, I will attempt to guide you into purer and better paths!"

"No—no," ejaculated Faust, deeply touched by the artist's kind tone and friendly language: "there is no hope for me! But when I contemplate the ruin which menaces the present happiness of that youthful and tender pair, I feel as if I were going mad! This evening they knelt at my feet—they supported with their appealing looks the desire of the Archduke, the Archduchess, and Theresa, that I would accord my assent to their immediate union; and—miserable being that I am!—I promised my decision to-morrow at mid-day!"

"And that decision must of course be favourable," said Otto. "Indeed, my lord, it will be the happiest moment of your life when, according to bounden duty, and in obedience to religious as well as social laws, you shall stand at the holy altar and bestow your daughter upon the young prince who is so well worthy of her hand."

"Now, Otto, you have touched a chord which vibrates to my very heart's core!" exclaimed Faust, almost frantically: "you have probed to its depths the wound that no human hand can cure—and which," he added, suddenly changing to a slow and profoundly melancholy tone, "no power in another world will ever vouchsafe to heal! You tell me that I must lead my daughter to the altar;—know, Otto Pianalla, that I dare not approach that sacred fane—I dare not even cross the threshold of the temple of worship!"

These words were uttered with a deep sigh, and in a voice and manner that made the artist tremble—so awful, and yet so mysteriously vague was their import.

Indeed, Otto knew not what to say in reply.

"Yes," continued Faust, drawing close to the artist, and whispering in his ear, in a hoarse and hollow tone; "I am accursed! Ask me not how—seek not to question me! Talk not to me in the usual way of injunctions of repentance: quote no texts to prove that there is hope of mercy for all the world! I am not like my fellow-men: I am accursed! Hope exists not for me: no prayer—no penitence—no self-mortification could change my fate. The masses of all the priests that ever donned gown or alb might not benefit me: the supplications of all the anchorites that ever wore away the hard rock with their knees, bent in holy beseeching, would not alter my destiny in any one of all its terrible details! Speak not, then, of hope—or prayer—or penitence in behalf of me: for I am accursed!"

"My lord, you terrify me!" exclaimed Otto. "How can any human being place himself beyond the pale of heaven's promised mercy, unless—"

"Unless what?—speak, Otto!" cried Faust. "Does a suspicion of the truth now occupy your mind? Oh! if such be the case, there is none other in the world to whom I would reveal all—confess all—so readily as to you;—for your words have denoted a generosity of feeling—a friendship—which I never could have expected from you towards me! Ah! next to woman's pure and fervent love, friendship possesses the most soothing balm even for a heart so devoid of hope—so despairing as mine!"

"I see that you are unhappy—very unhappy," said Otto, strangely bewildered and embarrassed by all he had just heard; "and I fear that you are criminal—very criminal! But how you have erred—in what you have

sinned so deeply that no hope exists for you, and that you dare not approach the altar of the Almighty—I cannot—cannot divine!"

"Then seek not to know my secret, Otto—seek not to know it!" cried Faust, his eyes burning with fearful lustre as he spoke—for horrible were the ideas of his imagination. "Think only of what I have said to thee concerning the happiness of that young pair—their hands must be joined by the priest—and yet I dare not accompany them to the altar! What apology can I offer for an absence that will seem an insult to the Archduke and his amiable spouse? what excuse can I render to my own wife for behaviour so wicked and so unnatural?"

"Alas! my lord, how would you that I should attempt to extricate you from such a dread labyrinth of difficulty?" demanded Otto.

"Can you not devise some project—invent some scheme that may reasonably account for my absence, and enable you to represent me at the altar!" cried Faust. "Oh! save me from this cruel dilemma—rescue me from this fearful embarrassment? I come to you, because one word of excuse—one syllable of apology from your lips will suffice to calm the minds of those who are so deeply interested in this intended marriage; for they know that you are all sincerity—all honour—all truthfulness!"

"And never shall they have occasion to think otherwise, my lord," exclaimed Otto, almost sternly. "No—not even to ensure the happiness of that young couple in whom I myself feel so deeply interested—not even for their sake would I, under such solemn circumstances, devise a falsehood or utter a lie!"

"Then am I ruined—lost—undone!" exclaimed Faust: "and I erred in trusting to your friendship!"

"Nay—there you do me wrong, my lord!" cried Otto, warmly. "Show me how I can serve you with honour to myself—tell me of any danger that, if incurred by me, would in its effects benefit you—point out to me any mode by which I may relieve you of one single grain of that mighty weight of mysterious sorrow which lies upon your heart, and I will not shrink from undertaking aught that may be of advantage to thee, so that it injure not my own good name!"

"I thank you, sir," said Faust, coldly; "but I see not how your services could aid me, with all the conditions you impose. I need not observe that what has now passed between us remains inviolably secret."

"Your lordship may trust me without fear," answered Otto; "and even yet my services may prove available to you."

Faust made no direct reply, but took his leave of the artist.

## CHAPTER LXXXIV.

### THE REVELATION OF A SECRET.

THIS interview produced a most painful impression upon the mind of Otto Pianalla.

He remembered all that he had ever known or heard of Faust,—his mysterious escape from the prison of Wittenberg—the strange manner in which he had liberated Theresa from Linsdorf Castle—the ease with which he had turned the fortune of the fight on the walls of Rosenthal—that sudden accession to wealth and rank which had enabled him to claim successfully the hand of the Lady Theresa—and then those fits of black moodiness which were known at times to seize upon him—his troubled dreams—his perpetual absence from a place of worship—and now his confession that he dared not cross the threshold of the temple of God, and his fearful self-denunciation that "he was accursed,"—all these circumstances crowded together in Otto's brain, and gave as it were form and consistency to those suspicions which had ere now dimly and vaguely flitted like impalpable shadows before him.

"There is but one solution for this terrible mystery," thought Otto, with a cold shudder; "and that—Oh! no—no!—it cannot be! Yet such tales have been told—of how men in a moment of despair have sold themselves to Satan! But can it be that the powers of darkness are allowed to league themselves with human beings? Oh! it is too fearful to contemplate! Heaven grant for the sake of the amiable Theresa—for the sake of the young and innocent Adela—and for his own sake—Oh! heaven grant that these dread suspicions which now haunt me may prove groundless—baseless!"

Otto's reverie was interrupted by a strange noise in the street—as if two men were struggling for life or death beneath the window of the very room in which he was pacing backward and forward;—and then there arose a loud cry for help.

Without another instant's hesitation, Otto Pianalla rushed from the apartment—precipitated himself down the stairs—and hastened into the street.

The night was pitch dark; and the sounds which had disturbed him had yielded to deep silence.

Drawing his sword, Otto advanced a few paces up the street; and his foot suddenly encountered a human form stretched upon the pavement.

To raise the prostrate man and bear him to his house, was with Otto the work of only a few moments; and, on summoning his servants, who speedily hastened to the hall, bearing lights in their hands, the compassionate artist was gratified with the discovery that the object of his solicitude still breathed.

But how great was Otto's astonishment when the light, suddenly falling upon the countenance of that old and venerable-looking man, revealed to him the features of Dr. Dorenberg, physician to the Archducal family.

He was evidently wounded in a severe manner; for the blood flowed from his breast, and the front of his doublet was saturated with the crimson tide.

While one of Otto's servants hastened to procure surgical assistance, the others, aided by their master, conveyed the wounded man to a chamber, where they undressed him, and placed him in a bed.

Otto stanching the blood that flowed from the deep wound in Dorenberg's breast as well as he could; and Nina, whom Otto sent for from the supper apartment, was active in the preparation of everything which the kind and active fancy of women in such cases invariably suggests for the relief of sick or wounded.

In a few minutes Otto's own family surgeon arrived; and, when he examined the wound, he shook his head ominously.

"There is danger?" whispered Otto, anxiously.

"The wound is not mortal, it is true," replied the medical attendant; "but Dr. Dorenberg is an old man, and has lost much blood. Therefore the case is perilous; but we must not despair."

The surgeon then dressed the wound in a skilful manner; and, while he was thus employed, Dorenberg opened his eyes, and seemed to revive a little. A potion was administered to him: every precaution was adopted to prevent the wound from bleeding anew; and the medical attendant took his departure, with a promise to return in a couple of hours.

Otto expressed his determination to pass the night by the side of the wounded man; but Nina insisted that it was her duty to keep the vigil. They therefore agreed to bear each other company.

When the surgeon returned at midnight, he found his patient wrapped in a deep sleep; his presence was not therefore needed; and, after giving a few necessary directions, in case the wounded man should awake ere he returned in the morning, he once more took his departure.

Otto then insisted that Nina should retire to rest; and she reluctantly obeyed his wish.

The artist was now alone with the wounded man, who continued to sleep soundly. Hour after hour passed, and Otto did not close his eyes. Whenever an inclination to sleep came upon him, he rose and walked gently up and down the room, to shake off that drowsiness.

And during that long vigil his thoughts dwelt chiefly upon his late interview with Faust, and the appalling suspicion that had arisen in his mind with respect to him.

At length the morning dawned:—gradually the light broke through the casement of the chamber.

Otto was seated in an arm-chair, close by the head of the couch on which the wounded man lay; and he was watching the perceptible gradency with which the morning was breaking, when a faint voice said: "Where am I? what means this weakness which I feel? have I been haunted by a dream? or—"

"Compose yourself, sir," interrupted Otto, in a kind but earnest tone: "you have been seriously wounded—and your recovery depends to a great degree upon yourself."

"That voice—I should know it," murmured Dorenberg, as if endeavouring to wrestle with his failing memory: "Ah! yes—it must be Messer Pianalla who speaks to me."

"It is," returned Otto: "and may I hope this assurance will convince you that you are with friends. But compose yourself—I beseech you."

"Messer Pianalla," said Dr. Dorenberg, "I must speak—if only a few words. Heaven be thanked that it is under your roof I now find myself;—for there is not in the world a being to whom I would more readily unburden my soul than to you—no—not even to a priest!"

"Ah! sir—what is it that you say?" exclaimed Otto:

"you cannot have aught that lies heavily upon your soul—you who are eminent for your virtues as for your talent!"

"Think not, good Otto," returned the physician, the voice becoming stronger with the mental excitement of the moment,— "think not that outward appearances are always true reflections of the human heart. No—no: there is one object which man covets more greedily than any other—which leads him even from his God—which draws him towards Satan—and which, with the temptation of an hour, can annihilate whole years of integrity and virtue!"

"And that object?" said Pianalla, now deeply interested in the physician's solemn language, which seemed to prelude some strange revelation of crime.

"Gold!" exclaimed Dorenberg, bitterly; "gold is the fiend to whom I sold myself! For gold I forgot a long life of honour and rectitude;—for gold I sacrificed all the principles of integrity and virtue!"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Otto, now seriously alarmed lest the wounded man should expire unconfessed and unshriven: "Oh! for a priest to soothe you now—to receive the words which you are about to utter—to hear and to console you!"

And he rushed towards the door.

"Come back!—forbear!" exclaimed Dorenberg, in a tone of mingled command and appeal. "To you—and to you only—shall this secret, that weighs upon my soul, be made known; for you are a man of honour, and you will retain it inviolate in your own breast while I live. But when I shall be no more—"

"Compose yourself—tranquillize your mind," interrupted Otto; "and postpone this revelation, which gives you pain, for a few hours—a few days—"

"A few hours—a few days!" repeated Dorenberg, in a tone expressive of deep emotion: "I have not a day—perhaps not an hour—to live! No—the dagger of the murderous robber who attacked me last night, as I was on my way homeward from visiting a patient, has done its work too truly!"

"The medical attendant who dressed your wound declared that it was not mortal," said Otto; "and with repose—tranquillity—"

"Patience, good Pianalla," interrupted the doctor: "I must unburden my mind—to you—ere I can hope for repose or tranquillity in this life or salvation in another. Draw near—and listen attentively. The secret I am about to communicate must not be breathed save in a faint whisper; for were even echo to repeat it, all Vienna would suddenly become aroused with fierce and furious indignation—and I and another should be torn limb from limb by an enraged populace! Draw near, I say—closer still!"

Otto approached his ear to the lips of the wounded man, and awaited in breathless suspense the revelation of a secret which was heralded by so dread a prologue.

"You remember," continued the physician, in a tone so low that it was only just audible,— "you remember that little more than eighteen years have elapsed since two ladies of high rank became mothers in the archducal palace, on the same day—at the same hour—almost at the same minute?"

"I remember it well," answered Otto. "You were, if I mistake not, in attendance on the Archduchess Maria?"

"I was," returned Dorenberg: "would that I had never seen her! But on that occasion two children were born—"

"Yes—the Prince Maximilian and the Lady Adela."

"Such are indeed the names which they now bear," continued the doctor; "but it is Adela who should be called a Princess, and the youth the Viscount Maximilian!"

"Merciful heavens!" cried Otto; "what would you have me infer? Oh! speak—tell me—"

"I would have you understand the truth," interrupted Dorenberg, speaking louder and more solemnly: "and the truth is that there was a fearful conspiracy devised to render unavailing the precautions of the Chamber of the Cradle—"

"Oh! I begin to understand! My God—it is a dreadful secret that you impart to me!" exclaimed Otto, trembling from head to foot.

"Yes—it is a fearful secret," said the wounded man; "and one which I could not carry with me to the tomb! For the children were changed, Pianalla, a few hours after their birth—"

"Oh! just heaven!" cried Otto, clasping his hands together: "did not the maternal instinct on either side ever point to this dread fact? Theresa loves Maximilian better than Adela—and the Archduchess Maria has mourned for the preference which she herself has shown towards Adela over Maximilian! Ah! doctor—this is

indeed a fearful secret! But how can it be corroborated? how may this avowal be sustained?"

"Otto," said Dorenberg, in a faint and dying tone—for the mental excitement which had sustained him throughout this strange and moving scene was now fast yielding to the effects of a dangerous reaction—"Doctor Lutzen, who attended upon the Countess of Aurana, and Dame Herder, the nurse who was engaged for the offspring of the Archduchess Maria,—they both live, and can be made to confess their share in that monstrous deed!"

"One word more!" ejaculated Otto; "who was the instigator—"

"Faust, Count of Aurana!" murmured the doctor, in a voice scarcely audible. "But—till I shall be no more—keep the secret—inviolable;—and—let me—die—in peace!"

"Oh! now for a priest—he is expiring!" cried Otto, almost bewildered at the wondrous revelation which he had just heard.

He rushed from the room, and despatched two of his domestics, one for a priest—another for the surgeon.

Then he returned to the bedside of the wounded man;—but useless was medical aid now for him—unavailing was the coming of the priest!

Doctor Dorenberg was no more!

## CHAPTER LXXXV.

### THE KALENBURG.

ALMOST at the same hour in the morning at which the confession and death of the physician took place at the house of Otto Pinnalla, two tall forms stood on the summit of the Kalenberg,—that hill from which, nearly two centuries afterwards, the troops of Sobieski, King of Poland, rushed down upon the army of the Grand Vizier, Kara Mustapha, and delivered Vienna from the siege of the Ottomans.

Of those two persons, though both bore the human shape, yet one only was human.

"Repeat thy wishes here," said the Demon, in his deep sonorous voice, as he turned his eyes of supernal but sinister lustre upon Faust. "It is not for me to search into thy motives: but I am ready to obey thy commands."

"These, then, are my wishes—these are my commands," exclaimed Faust, who was in a state of extraordinary mental excitement:—"by means of thine infernal power thou wilt perform some deed that shall avert the attention of Vienna from the every-day pursuits of life—that shall paralyse public affairs and private arrangements—that shall cause even lovers to forget their hopes of being immediately united at the altar!"

"You command me to do a fearful thing, Faust," said the Demon. "Reflect for a moment—I would not have you reproach me hereafter!"

"I am decided—delay not, whatever be the consequences!" cried the Count, impatiently.

"One word ere the order go forth!" observed the Demon. "Hast thou forgotten the whirlwind which I raised on the heights of the Brocken, and which devastated whole provinces in Germany?"

"I have forgotten nothing of all that," answered Faust: "and would that I could act now without recurrence to thy ferocious and infernal powers! But question me no farther—hesitate no longer! I care not what convulsion of nature—what awful visitation thou mayest bring about: only let not the result of thy command be temporary;—let it endure for weeks—ay, for months and months—so that it paralyse all the usual proceedings of society in this part of the world!"

"Thou shalt be obeyed!" cried the Demon.

Then, turning his face towards the East, he extended his right arm, and chanted the following incantation:—

"Come hither, fatal Cloud of Death!  
O'er Europe roll with blasting breath;  
Leave for awhile thy lov'd Japan;  
Sweep o'er the heights of Kimengshan;  
In Tartary, thou shalt not stay,  
Nor rest o'er Persia in thy way:  
Stop not on Ganges' bank to free  
From funeral pyre the dark Suttee;  
Let the Affghan unperill'd roam,  
Nor pause to touch the Tartar's home;  
Spare them that dwell upon the Nile;  
Leave harmless each Ionian isle;—  
But all thy power and fury bring  
To Europe, on death-dealing wing:  
Cover the land with corpses o'er  
From Greece to Scandinavia's shore.

Let Turkey wail, and Russia groan,  
And Italy give back the moan;  
Let Germany thy presence know,  
And France take up the tale of woe:—  
Let not the lofty Pyrenees  
From Spain ward off th' envenom'd breeze:  
Rest on the Tagus for awhile,—  
Then seek the Briton's sea-girt isle!"

When the Demon began to speak, Faust kept his eyes steadfastly fixed upon the East, towards which quarter the fiend addressed his terrible incantation.

In a few minutes a thin vapour appeared to rise in the oriental horizon; and it gradually—gradually advanced towards Vienna—becoming every instant more palpable, and losing that transparency which was merely an appearance given to it by distance.

Onward it came—nearer and nearer,—expanding in volume—spreading itself out, with strange elasticity, over meadow, grove, village, town, plain, and hill,—until it seemed one vast cloud, whose extremities touched the horizon on either side.

And onward—onward still it came; and now it approached the neighbourhood of Vienna—it swept over the Kalenberg, enveloping Faust and the Demon in a dense yellow mist.

But that mist!—how feculent was its odour—how nauseating the taste it created in the mouth—how oppressive its noxious density!

Faust trembled—he dared not ask the meaning of this strange and awe-inspiring visitation.

By the time the chant was concluded, the mist had overspread the city and the country all around; and the air was as dark as if there was an eclipse of the sun.

The Demon's sonorous voice had ceased—and Faust beheld with appalling misgivings the first result of the incantation.

In a few moments the mist began to clear away from the eastern quarter: it was advancing westward—a huge and almost endless volume of dense and nauseating fog.

Onward still it went: by degrees it departed from all the territory which the eye could command east of the Kalenberg; and fast—fast it now rolled towards the west.

At length it began to diminish in bulk as it proceeded farther and farther in its course: again did it lose its appearance of denseness and its deep yellow hue—seeming more and more transparent as it receded towards the Atlantic.

From the moment that the incantation commenced until the mist appeared no larger than the palm of the hand in the western horizon, scarcely ten minutes had elapsed;—but those ten minutes appeared an age to the Count of Aurana.

"Fiend, what dread visitation is this?" he exclaimed, unable to endure any longer that torturing state of suspense.

"A visitation called forth in obedience to thy wishes," answered the Demon, in a malignant tone of triumph;—"a visitation evoked from the east, where it would have remained but for thy command!"

"And this visitation?" cried Faust: "what is it? What meant that horrible mist? what hast thou done to Vienna?"

"I have obeyed thee faithfully, Faust," replied the Demon: "society will now be paralysed indeed;—for the Plague is in Europe—the Black Death has already commenced its ravages in Vienna!"

"Fiend—demon! undo thine awful work!" exclaimed Faust, appalled at the terrible words which fell upon his ears.

"No—it is too late!" answered the Demon, calmly; "did I not bid thee reflect? Blame not me—it is thou who hast done it all!"

And with folded arms, he began to descend the mountain with slow and measured steps.

"Ah! wretch—monster that I am!" almost shrieked Faust, dashing his open palm against his forehead:—then, after a few moments' agonising hesitation, he rushed frantically down the hill, and entered the plague-stricken city.

## CHAPTER LXXXVI.

### THE BLACK DEATH.

YES:—fatal indeed was the incantation of the Demon—for the Black Death had suddenly manifested its terrible presence in Vienna!

When Faust re-entered the imperial city, he observed horror and dismay depicted upon the countenances of the inhabitants whom he met in the streets.

And those persons were not walking along with the usual appearance of security and confidence:—they were hurrying hither and thither,—pausing only to cross themselves at the doors of churches, or as they passed the niches in the walls where images of the saints were placed; then rushing wildly on until they reached the houses of the physicians of whom they were in quest.

Oh! how happy was he who found the medical attendant at home, and could prevail upon him to accompany him to his own house where a wife, a mother, a child, or other dear relative had suddenly been assailed by a pestilential malady!

And how horrible were the wailings of those who found no physicians disengaged, or who, having found them, vainly essayed prayers and threats to induce them to visit the plague-stricken victims!

For that dense cloud which had passed over Europe, was seen and even felt in Vienna, as elsewhere; and while it was still lingering over the city, men, women, and children were suddenly assailed with fearful symptoms,—struck down as it were by a flash of lightning that seared and scorched without killing them on the spot:—then, when the noxious mist had rolled away, rumour, with its myriad tongues, circulated from house to house, and street to street, the dread news how here and there those symptoms had appeared;—and in one short hour after the going forth of the infernal incantation from the heights of the Kalenberg, Vienna knew that the plague had seized upon its very heart!

And this plague, too, was of so malignant—so terrible a nature, that no other mortal scourge was known to possess such death-dealing influences. For, a hundred and sixty years before the period of which we are now writing, this same plague had ravaged Europe, and had carried off two-thirds of the entire population. Hence had that visitation received the terribly significant name of the *Great Mortality*; and the pestilence itself was denominated, with a not less fearful propriety, the *Black Death*.

Tradition had not allowed dumb oblivion to absorb one single detail of all the horrors that the first appearance of the Black Death, in the middle of the fourteenth century, had brought into Europe:—no—all the circumstances of that dread crusade of pestilential fury against human life had been duly preserved, and handed down from generation to generation;—and many, many a fervent prayer had been offered up—many a princely fortune had been left to the Church to purchase masses—many a well-meaning but mistaken bigot had fled from the world and become an anchorite,—and all with the hope of moving heaven to save Christendom from another such visitation!

It was therefore with additional horror—with the wildest dismay—that Vienna, now again recognised the presence of its terrible guest!

At first, men were unwilling to believe that so awful an event could indeed recur:—they shrank aghast from even the idea of admitting that the Black Death could be again amongst them!

But as the symptoms,—those symptoms so well known by the traditionary memories of the former aspect and features of the dreadful malady,—developed themselves;—as farther reasoning against the possibility or even the probability of the return of the pestilence became the less feasible;—and as the awful conviction rapidly forced itself on the minds of those who had remained most obstinate in their scepticism,—then commenced scenes of a nature so appalling that no pen can convey an idea of one tithe of their intense—their agonizing horror!

The ordinary pursuits of society were indeed paralysed; and all previously-formed plans of happiness, business, trade, occupation, and domestic arrangement, were checked as cruelly and abruptly as if every principle of the human mind were in a moment subverted.

Imagine a family party interrupted in the midst of its Christmas festivities by the sudden death of the master of the house as he sits at the head of his table:—what a fearful change is in a single instant brought into that dwelling!—how rapid is the transition there from joyous smiles to bitter tears—from peals of laughter to heart-breaking moans! Imagine this, we say—and it will give you, reader, some idea of the desolation and misery that abruptly seized upon the inhabitants of Vienna!

For when a pestilence enters the walls of a town, it produces a common wail, as if the entire people were only one vast family, and the town itself only one vast dwelling-house!

Brightly rose the sun that morning upon the imperial city; and the myriad inmates of those countless habita-

tions awoke in the confidence of health and security. An hour passed—and how changed was the scene!

Death had entered the mighty capital with a two-edged scythe, and began to mow down the people on his right, and on his left, as if to fulfil the words of the inspired writer who solemnly said, "ALL FLESH IS GRASS!"

And now, as Faust made his way through the streets, he beheld men running wildly along, and women, half-naked and with dishevelled hair, screaming from the casements and the balconies for aid.

The modest beauty which at other times would not have left its chamber without the lace covering upon the neck, now thought not of shame as it stood with bare bosom and naked arms at the door or the window, shrieking for a physician to hasten to a darling child, a dear husband, or a deeply-valued parent!

And shocking were the symptoms of this dire disease! Inflammatory boils and tumours broke out upon the flesh with astounding rapidity;—the loveliest face was in one short half-hour rendered revolting with a putrid eruption;—and these blains speedily grew darker and more loathsome in hue, until they changed into the hideous black spots that gave to the pestilence its significant name.

Terrible pestilence!

Fearfully significant name!

Those black spots indicated a condition of putrid decomposition;—the tongue grew also black, and swelled so as nearly to suffocate the victim—lolling out of his parched mouth, and between his livid lips, and experiencing a thirst so burning that no beverage, however sharp or acid, could assuage that agonizing sensation:—large gouts of thick black blood were expectorated;—the breath exhaled an odour so nauseating that it was pestilence itself;—and violent pains crowned the infernal torments which the wretched patient thus endured.

Some—but these were a very few—became stupefied, lost their speech from palsy of the tongue, and sank into a lethargy which soon ended in death.

But by far the greater portion of the plague-stricken victims writhed on their beds, in horrible consciousness of their frightful state,—a consciousness to which the agony of pain and the heat of scorching thirst allowed no mitigation—no relief! Had they been encircled in the folds of a huge boa constrictor,—his coils twining tightly round their forms—his forked tongue licking their countenances—his pestiferous breath pouring with nauseous heat upon them—and the prospect of a horrible death from such a monstrous reptile before them,—they could not have suffered more!

All, save those few who fell into that lethargy which was so enviable in such a case, prayed that death would put a speedy end to their agonies; and many even laid violent hands upon themselves in the midst of their despair.

Contagious and infectious as it was, the Black Death proceeded not gradually with its ravages: its desolation was wholesale—vast—immense—answering throughout the imperial city.

The most sacred ties of kindred were in numerous cases utterly dissolved,—parents abandoning their infected children—children rushing in dismay from the houses where their parents lay writhing in the agonies of the plague—friends deserting dearest friends—husbands seeking a retreat from the pestilential breath of the wives whose beauty was late their pride and their joy—wives madly flying from the husbands whom they had erst pressed to their bosom—lovers turning in disgust, and loathing, and alarm from the mistresses adored an hour before!

The physicians themselves saw that human aid was vain, and that destruction inevitably awaited all who approached the infected.

Terrific mortality!

Appalling scourge of the human race.

And not only to the human race did its malignity extend; for its ravages were spread amongst the brute creation. If a dog touched the garments of a plague-stricken victim who fell dead or dying in the street, it caught the contagion—began to stagger about—and at length sank down and expired in horrid agonies, as if poison had been injected into its veins. The cat that sat on the domestic hearth escaped not the general desolation; and the bird that perched on the window-sill of the sick chamber, rose on buoyant wing no more.

From the diseased to the healthy—from the young to the old—from the old to the young—from man to the brute—and from the brute to man, spread the fury of the pestilence, as the flames in the prairies of the New World

extend from the dry grass to the withered tree, and over the heath, thence to the ripe corn, even unto the mighty forest,—streaming onward—onward, with a rage and a velocity which neither Indian nor animal can escape!

And such was the Black Death!

None who were seized with the terrible disease lived more than three days: some died in as many hours;—others fell dead upon the spot, as if struck with apoplexy or blasted by lightning; and, although they had not a spot upon their skin a moment previously, yet immediately afterwards their body was covered with the black plague-boils.

The people of that age were inclined to superstitious belief, and a great majority were plunged in all the ignorance of bigotry:—they were therefore easily accessible to absurd rumours and fanciful opinions. Moreover, the presence of such a fearful visitation prostrated all the mental energies of even those who escaped the contagion; and the most absurd, but alarming, reports prevailed.

Amongst other beliefs thus propagated, was one which obtained such general credence, and was of so appalling a nature, that it enhanced to a terrible degree the wild alarms naturally produced by the fury of the pestilence. It was believed, in a word, that the very eyes of the plague-stricken were the sources of contagion; and thus the appealing glances which relatives turned towards relatives, and friends towards friends, when seized with the first dread warning of the malady, were deemed to be fiery arrows that would carry the venom of the Black Death to the hearts of all on whom those looks were cast.

But of what avail was flight to the timorous, since their garments were already saturated with the pestiferous atmosphere!

## CHAPTER LXXXVII.

### THE TRUE FRIEND.

SUCH was the Black Death, whose ravages had now commenced in Vienna.

And throughout the imperial city there was but one man who feared not the rage of the pestilence,—who dreaded not contagion,—who knew that infection possessed no terrors for him!

This man was Faust!

He was pursuing his way—as we ere now left him,—through those streets which already indicated but too significantly that some appalling visitation had announced its presence in Vienna.

Men of the very lowest order of society,—starving wretches, who had but little to make life worth clinging to,—prototypes of the poor creatures who constitute involuntarily, and to the shame of the rich, the dark spots upon the disc of our modern civilization's sun,—oppressed and hopeless beings, rendered reckless by misery and despotism,—some of this class of men, we say, had already hired themselves to the city authorities to remove the dying from the streets and convey them to a vast building on the outskirts of the town, and which was used as a lazaretto. Others of the same social grade were employed to remove the dead,—for even within an hour from the going forth of the Demon's incantation, there were many dead,—from their houses, and consign them to graves hastily hollowed in the plain beyond the Kalenberg.

Thus the death-carts were already moving through the streets as Faust pursued his way.

He scarcely knew why,—but some strange influence seemed to impel him towards the house of Otto Pianalla. Indeed, he was so bewildered—so astounded—so horrified at the terrific commencement of that plague which had been brought at his command into the city, and the awful effects of which he could not do otherwise than foresee, that he staggered like a drunken man.

His mind was filled with horrible thoughts—his imagination was the seat of the most appalling ideas. If he had appeared to himself wicked and vile before—he now seemed loathsome, revolting, detestable, in his own estimation.

For, with all his superhuman power,—with all the infernal resources that were at his command,—he could not stifle the still small voice of reproachful conscience.

Thus, in the whirlwind of his chaotic ideas, he forgot home—family—all that was dear to him;—or he would have flown to remove them far—far from the reach of the plague!

Proceeding onward through the doomed city,—with wild rolling eyes, and agitated steps,—Faust gained the street in which Pianalla dwelt.

Without any precise aim in visiting the artist on this occasion,—but naturally attracted, in the depths of his

criminality, towards one who by his very nature was best able to offer him consolation,—Faust entered that house where only two hours previously Dr. Dorenberg had breathed his last.

He was conducted by a domestic to the same apartment where he had seen Otto on the preceding evening; and in a few minutes the artist made his appearance.

"Your coming is strange, my lord," said Otto, in a solemn and melancholy tone; "for I was most anxious to see you."

"To see me!" cried Faust; "and wherefore?"

"Because," answered Otto, drawing close towards the Count, and fixing upon him a penetrating glance,— "because, my lord, a secret of terrible import has ere now come to my knowledge—"

"A secret!" exclaimed Faust, starting convulsively.

"Yes, a secret that involves the happiness of two families," continued Otto Pianalla, almost sternly—so solemn and impressive was his manner:—"a secret which Dr. Dorenberg revealed to me upon his death-bed."

"Ah!" cried Faust, springing from his seat; "Doctor Dorenberg is then no more—and he has betrayed me? He has unbosomed to you the secret of the Chamber of the Cradle? 'Tis done—and cannot be recalled! But know, Pianalla," added the Count, casting a terrible look of defiance upon the artist, "that it is in my power—with a word—with a glance—to stifle within you that breath which might waft my secret to the ears of another,—to blast you with lightning,—to cast you dead at my feet. Therefore, beware!"

"Your threats, my lord, are mysterious and terrible," interrupted Otto, calmly; "but I put my trust in a higher power! At the same time, believe me, it was not my intention to use this secret so as to heap distress and dishonour upon your head;—for alas! if my suspicions be well-founded—and they have just received an awful corroboration from your lips, by means of those threats which prove you the possessor of some dread and unnatural power—"

"Yes—I am, indeed, the possessor of a dread—an unnatural power!" cried Faust, again hurried into the delirium of the most agonising thoughts, as his ears caught the sound of a death-cart rolling heavily along the street: "and for that power, Otto Pianalla," he added, in a tone of ineffable despair, "I have pledged my immortal soul!"

"Unhappy man!" cried Otto, hastening forward, and taking him by the hand; "do not make such a horrible revelation! Oh! no—no: it cannot be true! and yet—and yet—when I remember all that has occurred—your sudden elevation—your boundless wealth from an unknown source—the wondrous deeds that you have at times performed—"

"Alas! alas! it is but too true!" cried Faust. "And now, do you not shrink from me?—do you not recoil from my very touch?—are you not afraid that my looks will blast you?"

"As a man I do not shrink from you—as a Christian I do not fear you," returned Otto. "Oh! Faust, what have you done? But it is not for me to reproach you. Heaven knows you must be wretched enough! And—ah!—how you shudder when I pronounce holy names! Yes—you have indeed done a fearful thing! But it is not irrevocable—the mercy of God is infinite. I will pray for you—pray with you—"

"No—no!" cried Faust, wildly. "Were my lips but to quiver with the breath of a prayer, that moment would be my last! Satan would come, with all his terrors, to claim *His Own*!"

"Oh! what can be done?" ejaculated Otto, bewildered by the fearful convictions that had burst upon his mind within the last two hours. "I cannot abandon you thus hopelessly to your fate:—I cannot desert you—though all the rest of the world shuns you! No—I must counsel you—I must solace you! In what a terrible labyrinth of misery will you plunge those who are dear to you, unless some means be adopted to avert the threatening storm. Think, Faust—what can be done? On one hand is the Archduchess loving her who passes for your daughter: on the other is your wife—your devoted wife—loving the youth who is deemed the Archduke's son! Oh! shall this dread imposture continue? shall the true current of maternal feelings be impeded by self-reproach and imaginary wrong? Those mothers love each her own child; and yet the existing deception compels them to believe that instinctive affection to be a crime! Say, Faust—what must be done? I would not betray you, to heap additional misery upon your head: and yet—and yet—"

"And yet you know not how to disobey the voice of



duty!" cried Faust. "Oh! lost—degraded as I am, Otto,—I still can admire you! And now this generous sympathy which you show towards me,—towards me who have done you so much wrong,—oh! how welcome is such friendship to a solitary heart like mine! Why, therefore, should I keep any secrets unknown to you,—any of those terrific secrets which are so closely interwoven with my sad destiny? Listen, Otto—and prepare yourself to hear a tale that will make your blood turn cold within you!"

He paused for a moment, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

Otto filled a cup with wine and water, and handed it to the wretched man, who gladly moistened his parched mouth with the welcome beverage.

"Listen, I say, Otto," he continued, now speaking in a less rapid and excited, but more solemn tone; "listen—and do not recall your generous promise to counsel and to solace me—do not loathe me, when you hear my terrible narrative. And that narrative is as brief as it is terrible! Know then, that my love—my ardent, frenzied love for Theresa was the source of all my sorrows and all my crimes. That love induced her proud father to consign me to a dungeon, whence I was doomed to pass only to the scaffold. Accident placed within my reach a fearful spell: I used it—I brought the arch-fiend in human shape into my presence! He freed me; and to him I assigned my immortal soul for twenty-four years' lease of power! Ah! now you shudder!"

"For you—and not at you!" returned Otto. "Oh! believe me—I pity you from my very heart!"

"One portion of the compact which I signed—signed heedlessly and hurriedly," continued Faust, "declared that should I perform religious rite or ceremony, save with the fiend's consent, the period of my life and power should that moment cease. Alas! I sought to win Theresa by means that would make her mine without the intervention of priestly ceremony;—but it was all of no avail! I could have forced her to submit to my wishes, it is true; but I loved her tenderly and sincerely—and wished her to be mine in heart as well as in person. And then the fiend,—ever on the watch to secure fresh victims,—availed himself of my perplexity, and assented to the performance of the nuptial ceremony, on the condition—the fell, the dire condition—that I should assign to him the same power over my first-born son as he already possessed over me!"

"Merciful heavens!" cried Otto, astounded at what he heard: "and is it possible that so terrible a doom hangs over the head of the sweet—the amiable youth who bears the name of Maximilian?"

"Alas! it is but too true," returned Faust. "And it was to cheat the Demon, whose knowledge of what passes in the world can be baffled only by my will—I being his master and he my slave during my lease of power,—it was to cheat him of his prey that I changed the children within a few hours after their birth!"

"Oh! then it becomes impossible to reveal the secret of the Chamber of the Cradle!" exclaimed Otto. "Were that dread truth to be made known—were a son given to the arms of his true mother, and a daughter to those who are in reality her parents,—were Maximilian to be proved your progeny, and Adela the offspring of the Arch-lucifer,—the result would be to consign that amiable youth to the power of the fiend who has cast his meshes around yourself!"

"Thou hast hast reasoned well, good Otto," said Faust. "And now also canst thou understand wherefore I dare not assent to the union of those dear children—an union involving a ceremony at which I could not attend! But all present anxieties on that score have passed away; for, as thou doubtless art well aware, a terrible pestilence has fallen upon Vienna—and all social interests and all hopes of consummating pre-arranged projects are suspended by his appalling visitation!"

"Yes—the plague is in Vienna," said Otto; "and its avenges will be fearful! But it must pass away in due time;—and then, Faust—during the few years which yet remain to you on earth—how wilt thou procrastinate the union of that loving pair—should heaven, in its merey, spare them from the fury of the Black Death?"

"To one placed in so desperate a position as I, the espite of even a few weeks is a source of self-congratulation," answered Faust. "Even when the ravages of the plague shall have passed away, months and months must lapse ere society can return to that healthy and moral one of confidence which will permit the revival of projects now cruelly interrupted. It will then be time to consider—"

"No—it may then be too late!" interrupted Otto,

warmly. "How know you that the arch-deceiver who has you in his power has not deceived you? How know you that he has invested you with an authority so full and so complete that it can even place a barrier in the way of his knowledge of those circumstances which you wish concealed?"

"Oh! that idea—that dread idea often oppresses me—often weighs heavily upon my soul!" cried Faust. "And yet—I cannot believe that I am so deluded by the demon who is to control my future destinies!"

"Yet let wise precautions be adopted!" ejaculated Otto Pianalla. "Oh! consider how solemnly important is a subject which involves the safety of a human soul! Let that young pair abandon all hopes of being united:—it will be cruel to separate them—but far more cruel to endanger the eternal welfare of your son! Give me your consent—your authority—and I will entrust him with this appalling secret:—I will convince him of the necessity of retiring from the world—of devoting his days to a cloister—of taking up the cross, and thus acquiring the only efficient means of defying the power of the Demon!"

"Useless and unavailing project!" said Faust, in a melancholy tone. "Were Maximilian to don the gown of a priest—to mortify himself with severe penance—to lacerate his back with innumerable stripes of a knotted scourge—to wear away the hard stone with frequent kneeling,—still all would be ineffectual! From the very altar would the fiend tear his prey, when the hour came! No, Otto; the cloister may not avail my poor son! Within the reach of human power there is but one means to rescue him from the Demon, should the project of the Chamber of the Cradle fail:—and that one means—oh! who will attempt the perils and undertake the difficulties involved, for the sake of a wretch like me?"

"That duty shall be mine!" ejaculated Otto, eagerly. "Did I not last night assert my readiness to serve thee in all honourable ways? did I not even declare that the hour might come when such assistance would avail thee? This is the time for thee to explain thyself!"

"Is it possible!" cried Faust, a gleam of joy animating his countenance. "Oh! if I could believe that you would indeed embark in this cause, I should meet my terrific fate with one pang the less when the knell of my destiny shall sound!"

"You may rely on me, Faust," returned Otto. "Proceed—explain thyself!"

"Know, then," continued the Count of Aurana, almost joyfully, "that upon the summit of Mount Ararat rests the Ark in which the elect were saved from the rage of the Great Deluge! Thousands of years have passed since that time; but there the Ark still remains,—there, where it first touched the earth again! Cradled in eternal snows,—ice-girt throughout the lapse of ages,—it bids defiance to the ravages of centuries! But since the day when the Patriarch and his family went forth from that Ark no human eye has ever looked upon it—no human foot has ever approached the spot where, like the eagle's nest on the summit of the loftiest tree, it has its place. Tremendous are the precipices which surround it: vast chasms, yawning abysses, and steep paths of slippery ice, lie between the foot of the mountain and the top, whereon the Ark rests. But if a human being of stainless life and unapproachable conscience can surmount the perils of that dangerous ascent,—if by his courage and his strength he can climb that tremendous height and place his foot upon the summit of Ararat,—then may he break off a small piece—a fragment—of the wood of the sacred boat; and that fragment worn about the person of one whose parents have ere his birth consigned him to the eventual possession of the Powers of Darkness,—will prove a talisman enabling him to defy the influence of Hell!"

"And wherefore will not the same means rescue yourself?" demanded Otto, eagerly.

"No," returned Faust, in a tone of deep despair; "the compact that I have made was the result of my own free agency, and is beyond such relief! I must pay the penalty of my sin—my folly—my madness;—but those means will assuredly save my boy! O Pianalla, hast thou now the courage to undertake that fearful task?"

"I have—I will," answered the generous being thus appealed to. "Though a husband and a father—and though bound to think of my wife and little ones,—yet to save a soul is a duty above all other earthly considerations! Yes, Faust—I will dare the perils of that tremendous journey! This very day will I set out with my family for the East; them will I leave in some quiet and safe retreat, afar from the ravages of the plague;—and then shall this enterprise engage all my thoughts and all my energies!"

"And should you succeed, Otto," said Faust, dashing away a tear,—and tears were seldom shed by him!—"thou wilt save an immortal soul!"

"The hope to accomplish which aim will give me courage and strength in my undertaking," returned Otto; "and the knowledge that I shall have performed so imperative a duty will be glorious recompense. Heaven be thanked, no crime weighs upon my heart—my conscience has no sting!"

"Would that I could say the same!" murmured Faust; and, pressing the artist's hand in a manner that was far more expressive than words, he hurried from the room.

## CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

### THE FLAGELLANTS.

FOR six months did the Black Death continue its ravages in Europe.

Plague, pestilence, and famine stalked hand in hand over the most fertile provinces of Christendom—accompanied by draught, terrible atmospheric phenomena, innumerable swarms of locusts, deluges, earthquakes, hurricanes, and all the fury of elemental warfare.

Vegetation was destroyed—the harvests failed—and a pestiferous wind spread a poisonous odour over plains and valleys lately variegated with sweet flowers.

The great rivers overflowed their banks without apparent cause; for there were no rains during the visit of that awful plague and its fatal associates. But it was supposed that the terrestrial commotions which then occurred opened a way for the springs to gush forth in extraordinary quantity; because the commencement of the deluge in every district was heralded by the appalling sounds of subterranean thunder.

In many places chasms were formed in an inexplicable manner; and thence arose such noxious vapours that the air was infected far and wide—as if those pest-breathing openings had afforded issues for the foul vapours of hell.

The mighty city of Constantinople was crowded with the dying and the dead: vainly did the muezzin on the gallery of the minaret call the faithful to prayer; so terrific was the mortality—so dread were the agonies in which the plague-stricken expired, that even the superstitious Ottoman was driven by his despair to "curse God and die!"

And thou, too, O lovely isle of Malta! wast devastated by that death-dealing visitation! An earthquake shook thee to thy very foundations—the sea overflowed thy shores—thy ships were dashed to pieces upon the rocks—and in a few days wast thou changed from a fair and blooming spot to a desert on the bosom of that tideless sea which so lately wafted to thy ports the richly freighted argosies of Italy!

Greece—the clime of classic memorials and modern degradation—was not left unspared by the fury of the Black Death. Earthquakes shook down the temples in a moment—those temples which Time had not dared to touch: and the atmosphere was rendered pestiferous by the myriad corpses of the plague-stricken and the countless swarms of locusts.

Italy was almost depopulated. Whole villages were swallowed up by terrestrial commotion; and nine-tenths of the inhabitants of the great towns perished in the agonies of the plague. For that pestilence spared not Naples, with its lovely garden and its marble palaces looking upon the beautiful bay,—nor Venice, that ocean-queen whose greatness has passed away like a vision,—nor Genoa, whose enterprising spirit of commerce led it even to possess itself of a suburb of Constantinople,—nor Florence, whose merchants were princes,—nor Padua, the seat of learning—nor even haughty and once imperial Rome.

In Germany the pestilence and earthquake pursued their career with a fury as relentless as they displayed in devoted Italy. Carinthia saw thirty of its villages swallowed up by the opening chasms, in a few days: the city of Villach was also demolished by the trembling of the earth whereon it stood. Entire mountains were moved from their places; and while the world thus seemed to be shaken to its foundations, the dread mortality of the Black Death continued its awful ravages.

Russia, Prussia, Denmark, France, Spain, Portugal, and England were also visited by this pestilence, which seemed to instil a deadly poison into the bodies of men and animals; and upon the Mediterranean Sea numerous vessels floated about at the mercy of the waves, without a living soul on board to guide them to the port whither they were originally bound.

In the great cities and towns of Europe, the authorities forbade the publication of the numbers of the dead, and

prohibited the tolling of the bells at funerals, under the horrific apprehension that the living would abandon themselves to despair!

Twenty-five millions of people perished in Europe during that sad visitation!

But let us now confine our narrative of the effects and influence of the Black Death to the imperial city of Vienna.

Society sustained a mental shock which paralysed all its good and useful energies, and gave an impulse to the intrigues of the hypocrite and the gross delusions of the superstitious. Then was it that the Brotherhood of the Flagellants, or Scourgers, was instituted,—originating with men who turned the miseries of their fellow-creatures to their own selfish purposes, and subsequently recruiting its strength by means of fanatical bigots. Children and women were admitted into the body of Flagellants! and priests and nuns mingled in a tide which rolled along with a distracting frenzy.

The Flagellants marched through the city of Vienna,—as elsewhere,—in large but regular processions,—attired in black garments marked with huge red crosses, and with cowls drawn over the upper part of the countenance. In their hands they carried triple scourges, each lash provided with several knots to render the self-inflicted flagellation more severe. Some of the most rabid of these fanatics even fastened pieces of sharp iron to their instruments of penance.

Thus did those gloomy-looking beings, while walking in slow and mournful procession through the city, seem like the spectres of the corpses that were strewed around!

And ever and anon the Flagellants would stop in some open place or convenient spot; then, falling upon their knees and baring their shoulders, they scourged themselves with such fury that the blood poured down their backs and the flesh was torn away by the hard knots or the pointed pieces of iron. But the influence of this hypocrisy or fanaticism was great indeed upon the people who had escaped the dread mortality, and who beheld this strange self-mortification. Gold poured upon the Flagellants: even misers showered their long-hugged hoardings upon the penitents who took upon themselves the sins of all the human race! Nobles sent them forth massive silver candlesticks and banners of velvet and gold to embellish their processions: precious stones and costly jewels were lavished upon them; and ladies of the highest rank embroidered flags and kerchiefs as tokens of an enthusiastic veneration.

By night the Flagellants traversed the city with burning torches,—stopping at the church doors, to scourge themselves upon the cold steps, and making the darkness terrible with their hideous howlings.

The more appalling became the ravages of the pestilence, the more accessible to the delusions of the grossest superstition did the minds of the people grow; and when the Grand Master of the Flagellants had the astounding insolence and unblushing effrontery to proclaim one day to the inhabitants of Vienna that he had received a letter from the Saviour himself, there was scarcely a voice throughout the city that ventured to express a doubt of the truth of this monstrous statement!

Yet such was the fact! The blasphemous declaration was made—boldly made; and the pretended epistle was read to the crowds that went down upon their knees and listened to its contents with the tears of a grateful piety. For the letter gave assurance that, "although the Saviour was sore displeased at the sins of the human race, He had nevertheless granted, at the intercession of the Holy Virgin and the Angels, that all who should wander about for thirty-four days and scourge themselves, should be partakers of the Divine Grace!"

When this concoction of atrocious blasphemy was first read, a holy priest inquired who had sealed the letter;—to which question the Grand Master of the Flagellants replied with the meekness of one prepared to suffer insult and injurious suspicion, "*He who sealed the Gospel!*"

The effect of this vile manoeuvre was absolutely electric. Thousands and tens of thousands, who had wavered before, now joined the Flagellants: the inhabitants of the adjacent towns and villages—those, at least, whom the pestilence had as yet spared—poured into the imperial city, to join the Brotherhood of the Cross!

And in a short time Vienna became the scene of complete demoralisation, as well as of pestilence and famine. The Flagellants committed the most outrageous excesses: the sanctity of the convents was invaded; and the nun became a prey to their lust. Reckless, too, of contagion they broke into the dwellings where the dying lay, and from whence the dead had not yet been removed, and

plundered the coffers of plate, money, and precious jewels. Those who were cunning in feats of sleight of hand, undertook to perform miracles; and the deluded people placed firm reliance in the truth of exhibitions which would shame the professed skill of the most flimsy conjuror at a modern country fair.

But of all the atrocities perpetrated by the Flagellants, the most abominable—the most unparalleled was the accusation which they levelled against the Jews.

While the rage of the Black Death was at its height,—and when the most eminent physicians of the age were at variance as to the cause of its origin, and in respect to the means of mitigating its fury, if such human means there were,—the Flagellants suddenly raised a cry of extermination against the innocent, the persecuted Jews!

"Fools that ye are!" exclaimed the members of the Brotherhood of the Cross: "ye waste precious time in vain and idle disputes concerning the causes of this dire visitation! Know ye not that the waters which ye drink are poisoned? The springs—the fountains—the cisterns—the wells—the very streams and rivers are poisoned!"

Then the crowds, who gathered round, aghast and stupefied, as these terrible words fell upon their ears, demanded with one voice who had perpetrated such a black and fiend-like deed.

"The Jews!" was the firm reply—delivered with an earnestness and an emphasis that carried conviction to the minds of men prepared, by misery and dread, to receive as truth any statement which came from the almost worshipped Flagellants.

Oh! terrible was the cry of rage and fury which then rose, wild and menacing, from the imperial city up to heaven.

"The Jews have poisoned the waters! Death to the Jews!" echoed from street to street, and from dwelling to dwelling.

And then the massacre of the Israelites began.

We have often wept over the sorrows and sufferings of this persecuted and much maligned race:—but we now shed tears of bitter, bitter indignation as we dwell upon that fatal page of history which details all the horrors of this wholesale immolation!

Urged on by a dreadful panic,—obeying only the impulses of their own frenzied rage,—the people of Vienna commenced the extirpation of the Jewish inhabitants by means of fire and sword. Thousands of those unhappy martyrs to the infuriate passions which the Flagellants had excited, were burnt at the stake or murdered with the pointed steel, in the imperial capital. The rumour that the Jews had poisoned the waters spread like wildfire throughout Germany: far more rapid than the pestilence itself, the news were carried from city to town—from town to hamlet—even unto the very frontiers. Nor did the report rest there; but it was taken up by the voices of men in other climes;—the Alpine echoes wafted it into Italy;—and the reverberations of the Pyrenees conveyed it amongst the people of Spain.

But it is chiefly with Vienna that we have now to do;—and there the slaughter proceeded in a manner so ruthless, that human nature appeared to have become a mere incarnation of the demons. For when the stake and the sword failed to execute the work of immolation with sufficient speed to appease the bloody thirst of the infuriate multitudes, they enclosed hundreds of Jews at one time in a wooden building, which they set on fire. Then when Israelite mothers, holding their children in their arms, rushed forth,—when the dark-eyed daughters of the scattered race fled from the scorching flames,—and when the young men, and the old ones, burst from the burning tenement, rending the air with their prayers for mercy,—the panic-stricken Christians surrounded them with sharp weapons, and cut them down as children strip the leaves from a bough which they have plucked.

Vainly did the Archduke Leopold intercede with his imperial uncle to stop this horrible massacre. The Emperor's commands were powerless over a people reduced to desperation by a pestilence which struck some as if with lightning, and left others to die in the most excruciating agonies.

Driven to despair, the Jews laid violent hands upon themselves in all directions;—many a loving husband dealt the blow of death to the bosom of his tender wife, to save her from a more cruel martyrdom at the hands of Christians;—many a loving father immolated his little ones, who had sat upon his knees, to anticipate the murderous designs of the infuriate multitudes!

Amidst all these varied scenes which the Black Death had originated—scenes, some of which were so sad, others so horrible, and all so terrible—the influence of no law,

whether human or divine, was acknowledged. The hearts of the inhabitants were rendered inaccessible to feelings of humanity, propriety, or prudence. Some even plunged into a course of unbounded licentiousness and debauchery, as if in pursuance of the maxim, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die!"

But in this revelling and dissipation there was something horribly revolting; gaiety in the midst of a plague-stricken city was like dressing up a corpse with glittering jewels and with the most fragrant flowers of Spring.

## CHAPTER LXXXIX.

### ARARAT.

It was towards the end of February, 1513,—three months after the breaking out of the plague at Vienna,—that two travellers on horseback entered, at the close of a warm day, upon the vast plain in the midst on which Mount Ararat lifts its summit to the sky.

One of these travellers was Otto Pianalla: the other was a Turkish attendant, or *tatar*, whom the artist had engaged in Asia Minor as a guide.

Early in the morning of that day, the travellers had caught the first faint glimpse of the stupendous mountain, rising, like a blue cloud split in twain from the top, above the white mist which covered the entire plain. As they rode rapidly along, and drew nearer and nearer to the object of Pianalla's journey, the mountain stood out in bolder relief against the azure sky; and its two colossal peaks, mantled in eternal snow, glistened in the sunlight as if crowned with diadems of gold and precious stones.

Towards the afternoon the peculiar features of the immense mountain began to shadow themselves forth more clearly; and varied hues and lines marked the deep hollows, the clefts, the ravines, and the crags which rendered the ascent hopeless in the estimation of the inhabitants of that district.

As the sun receded farther and farther towards the western quadrature, the mellowed radiance showed more distinctly still all the grandeur and all the terrors of that mountain of ten thousand feet in height above the plain whereon it stands.

Appearing now of a grey hue against the deep purple sky, the base was marked with many dark shades, indicative of yawning chasms and frightful precipices; and as the eye travelled up the mount, those patches and hues became lighter and gradually less distinct,—until they were lost in the uniform colour of the upper portion of the eminence.

The region through which Otto Pianalla was now travelling, was well known to his Mussulman guide, who accordingly explained all the appearances and features of the mountain to his employer; for Murad,—such was the *tatar's* name,—spoke the German language fluently—a circumstance which had principally induced Otto to secure his services.

"And you say that the ascent of Ararat is an impossibility?" exclaimed Pianalla, breaking a long silence, as he and his companion journeyed onward, while the rays of the setting sun glittered upon the mist-like peaks of the venerable mountains.

"Impossible!" repeated the Turk: "you say well, Christian, when you couple the word *impossible* with the idea of scaling yon stupendous height. What mortal foot can climb those perpendicular rocks which frown over unfathomable abysses, to think of which is alone sufficient to make one's head swim round? what human strength can surmount the perils of those narrow ledges which wind round chasms into which a single false step must inevitably hurl the mad adventurer who dares those appalling dangers? Think you, Christian, that there exists a being in mortal shape who possesses agility sufficient to leap the wide gulfs which separate the higher from the lower ridges of the mountain? think you that human nature could endure the piercing cold of those heights where reigns an eternal winter? Oh! no: you have spoken well in using the word *impossible*!"

"But if no mortal step have ever yet ventured amidst the chasms, the crags, and the precipices which you speak of," said Otto, "how happens it that you are so proficient in describing their dangers?"

"Because there have been certain daring adventurers who have clambered as high as human skill and prowess could take them," answered Murad; "and they have stopped at those points the perils of which defied their strength and set their courage at naught. Rest well assured, Christian, that if the great Allah ever intended mortal foot to leave its print upon the snows of yon peaks, the stupendous undertaking would have been ere

now consummated; for what will not the thirst of gold induce avaricious man to venture and to dare?"

"I do not understand your allusion," remarked Otto, his heart sinking within him, as he became the more sensible of the apparent hopelessness of the task which he had volunteered to accomplish.

"I will explain myself," answered Murad. "The Koran and tradition alike lead us to believe that the ark of the Sultan Noah rested upon the loftier one of those two peaks; and the Greek Patriarch at Constantinople has offered a princely fortune to him who shall scale that peak, and secure some sacred relics of the boat which is cradled amidst the eternal snows of yon eminence. Many and many have been the desperate men who, allured by the hope of obtaining boundless wealth, have endeavoured to reach the ark. Some have never returned: others, who have come back in safety, have given so terrible a description of the perils of the ascent to even one-third of the height, that of late years no man has been found mad enough to undertake an impossible task. For it is not only that nature herself defends the paths which lead to the resting-place of the ark," added the tatar, sinking his voice to a low and ominous whisper; "but the powers of darkness alike combine to bar the dangerous way."

"Once more I must request you to explain yourself more fully," said Otto, who, though by no means inclined to gross superstition, was nevertheless anxious to glean as much information as possible relative to the perils of the task which he was determined to attempt.

"It is well known," continued Murad, "that evil spirits infest the chasms of Mount Ararat. In those unfathomable depths agitate monsters of every dreadful shape—fiends of every appalling form; and, wandering amidst the eternal snows, may be seen by those who are daring enough to venture thither, the pale, thin, and transparent ghosts of the wretched adventurers that have met their death in the vain attempt to scale heights which are inaccessible. But this is not all, Christian. Hast thou never heard of the ghoses—those horrible fiends which seek the burial-grounds at night, and feast upon the corpses which they exhume? The dwelling-places of the ghoses, Christian, are the yawning chasms, the deep dark gulfs, and the bottomless pits of Ararat! Oh! terrible are the sights which meet the eyes of those who venture among yon mountain regions! I have heard of men who have come back from the daring attempt to reach the ark—come back, I say, raving mad at the horrors they encountered! I have heard of others who were struck dumb with affright—and others, again, who have returned to their homes but to pine away rapidly, and die without apparent cause! But I have never heard of one who, having escaped death in those fearful chasms, did not regret that he had ever been led by love of gold or reckless daring to undertake a hopeless task. No: all who have returned from the desperate venture have carried with them to the grave some physical or mental affliction which struck them while wandering amidst the wilds of Mount Ararat."

"Your description is terrible indeed," said Otto. "But may not those details be exaggerated? did not the few who have returned from the attempt to scale the mountain, colour as highly as possible those dangers which drove them back, in order to escape the imputation of lack of courage to prosecute a task presumptuously undertaken?"

"Oh! no, Christian," answered Murad: "such a supposition is altogether unfounded. For were it possible to scale that height—could dauntless courage, prodigious strength, and consummate skill, achieve the great act—it would have been accomplished long ago! The Patriarch's offer of a princely fortune would alone tempt daring and desperate men to strain every nerve—encounter every peril—meet every horrible sight—and pass through every difficulty, to attain the grand object—were such, indeed, possible. But none have succeeded: all have perished, or have returned baffled, broken-hearted, or sorely afflicted—the punishment of their presumptuous rashness!"

"Yet one fact is certain," said Otto; "and this is that Noah and his family came down in safety from the mountain; and we are told of no miracle that was operated by divine power to facilitate this descent. If there be a path down the mountain, the same must lead the human foot to the summit."

"But you take no account, Christian, of the changes which the lapse of many, many centuries has effected in that mountain," observed Murad. "The snows accumulate in winter in far greater proportion than they dissolve with the summer-heat or the periodical rains: the

avalanches fall, and render unpassable what was a road before. The earthquake opens new chasms, and closes old ones: the thunder strikes the crags, and the huge masses roll down with tremendous din. In many places the snow itself becomes hard as marble: the rains form pools in the hollows—the cold freezes the bodies of water thus collected—and the ice thereof remains ice for ever! Say, then, Christian—can the features of the Ararat of to-day be the same as when the Sultan Noah descended from yon giddy peak?"

"There is reason in what you say," returned Pianalla, with difficulty concealing the sadness of his manner; for he cherished his own secret relative to the true object of his journey.

He knew well that should he succeed in his task,—that task which now appeared almost hopeless!—should he, in a word, be enabled to return from the summit of Ararat with so precious a relic as a piece of the Ark in his possession, his life would not be safe amongst the wild and predatory people who inhabited the region in the neighbourhood of the mountain. He was therefore anxious to arouse no suspicion of his intent in the mind of Murad. Not that he for a moment believed the tatar to be capable of treachery towards him. Far otherwise; for during their journey through Asia Minor, the Mussulman had given many proofs of his fidelity. But, like all guides, Murad was garrulous; and Otto prudently resolved not to make him the depositor of a secret which he might reveal in a moment of excitement, though not with an evil view.

Another interval of silence now ensued; for Otto was filled with gloomy reflections, produced by the appalling description which he had just heard respecting Mount Ararat.

It was not that he lacked courage; but his thoughts wandered to his beloved wife and two sons, whom he had left at Smyrna. To Nina he had frankly avowed the object of his journey; and she was too much devoted to her husband—entertaining too exalted an admiration of his chivalrous character and generous disposition—and was too deeply sensible of the solemn importance of his self-imposed task, to endeavour to dissuade him from his purpose. Still their parting had been sorrowful—very sorrowful!

And now, the nearer he approached to the scene of peril, the more he pondered upon those who were dear—so dear to him!

Should he ever see them again? or was he doomed to perish in the wilds of Mount Ararat?

He placed his faith in that all-wise, all-seeing Power which had led him safely through the perils of the Julian Alps, and which had saved his life from the murderous assault of Fritz. Yes—he placed his faith in Heaven;—and, as he fixed his eyes upon the stupendous mountain which rose, towering to the sky, at a distance of about four miles from the cottage where he and the guide now alighted, he breathed a silent prayer—and he felt consoled—encouraged!

The cottage was inhabited by Armenian Christians; and at their hands Otto received a cordial reception. The best food that their little farm and well-cultivated garden could supply, was speedily served up; and a bed of clean rushes was by no means unwelcome after the fatigues of the day's travel.

Otto slept tranquilly and happily until sunrise. Bright visions visited him: the face of his far-distant wife seemed to smile upon him;—it appeared, too, as if the countenances of his well-beloved sons looked joyously on him in his dreams;—and then he thought he beheld Adela and Maximilian approach his couch, kneel, and pour forth their fervent gratitude for a felicity which they owed to him!

He awoke at sun-rise, encouraged and confident under the influence of those visions of favourable augury.

His ablutions were speedily performed: he partook cheerfully of the copious meal provided by the good peasants; and, having declared his intention to wander throughout the entire day amidst the wild scenery of Mount Ararat, he set forth on his perilous undertaking.

The Armenians, judging from the intimation which he gave them, that he would not return until night-fall, provided him with a wallet containing a supply of food; and, as he left the door, Murad said, in a jocular manner, "If you do not come back by sun-set, I shall think you have been hardy enough to essay the ascent of the mountain!"

Otto laughed, and hurried away.

The spectacle now before his eyes was grand and splendid in the extreme.

The venerable Ararat was bathed in the mellowed radiance of the morning sun, and appeared to rise in solemn majesty from the midst of the vast plain whose extremes were lost in the distance.

The early vapours threw a species of illuminated haze upon the scene, rising mid-way up the mountain, but not reaching its two colossal peaks which stood out, with light bluish shades, against the warm yellow sky.

Otto advanced rapidly towards the scene of peril, and soon entered the bushy and marshy ground which skirts the base of Ararat on the western side. Half an hour's quick walking brought him to a rugged ravine, which he passed without materially relaxing his speed; and he then commenced the ascent of one of the shoulders which rise gradually from the plain.

Having reached the top of this eminence,—which, though tolerably elevated, was a mere dwarf in comparison with the snow-crowned giant that towered above,—Otto suddenly found himself upon the brink of a dark and yawning chasm, whose depths his eye could not fathom, and at the bottom of which a torrent rolled along with thundering din.

Otto retreated a few steps—almost in affright—from the gulf which appeared thus suddenly to open at his feet; and falling on his knees, he prayed aloud and fervently to Heaven—for he knew that the perils of his enterprise had now commenced.

And at that same moment the Demon stood upon the summit of Mount Ararat; and folding his arms across his breast, he chanted in his deep sonorous voice the following incantation:—

“Collect your rage, ye wild winds bleak  
On Ararat's tremendous peak;  
Split mighty crags!—your masses hurl  
Adown the mount with furious whirl!  
Rise, darkling mist, and settle o'er  
The depths profound where torrents roar;  
Awake dread echoes as ye flow,  
Swift eddies! in th' abyss below;  
Dense clouds! collect, and spread on high  
A pall athwart the azure sky;  
Glide avalanches! from your rest  
Upon the mountain's hoary crest;—  
Come from the dark pits where ye dwell,  
Imps of all shapes most terrible!  
Come, too, ye fitting ghosts that stare  
With glassy eyes in death-like glare;  
And ye, grim ghouls, whose hunger craves  
The rotting tenants of the graves  
Gather ye all at my command,  
Amidst the crags a grisly band!”

But nature responded not to the incantation of the Demon; nor did the spirits of darkness obey his voice.

The sun continued to shine from a cloudless sky: the tempest burst not from the bands which confined it;—the echoes of the torrents alone broke the solemn silence that reigned amidst the regions of Ararat.

Then the Demon knew that a higher power protected Otto Pianalla; and, with a terrible cry of rage, the fiend disappeared from the summit of the mountain.

## CHAPTER XC.

### THE RESULT OF OTTO PIANALLA'S ENTERPRISE.

HAVING acquired fresh courage and renewed confidence by means of his earnest, solemn prayer, Otto Pianalla rose from his knees, and calmly scrutinized the chasm which yawned at his feet.

We before said that his eyes could not fathom its depths; but the roar of the unseen torrent, eddying along in those dark profundities, indicated what must be the fate of one whose foot slipped on the edge of that abyss.

At the point where Otto now stood, the gulf was about twenty yards in width; and its precipitous sides were covered with stunted shrubs and brambles—for he had yet far to climb ere he might enter on the regions of snow.

With rapid step, but with watchful eyes, did Otto walk along the edge of the chasm, which gradually grew narrower; but to the disappointment of the artist, instead of at length becoming of such contracted width as to allow him to leap across it, it suddenly stopped at a point where huge masses of rock seemed to have been heaped upon each other by some giant whose object was to render the upper part of the mountain inaccessible to mortal feet.

Those piles of mighty crags,—stupendous accumula-

tions raised by the earthquake and the storm,—formed an insuperable barrier to Otto's path. He accordingly retraced his steps along the edge of the chasm—passed the spot where he had now knelt in prayer—and continued his way towards the other end of the abyss, which gradually became narrower, as was the case in the opposite direction.

At length the chasm presented an obstacle of only five or six yards in width; and at this point also huge masses of rock were so piled as to prevent the artist from proceeding as it were round the abyss.

There, then, was the fathomless gulf to be crossed!

The perspiration poured down Otto's countenance—for, though the intense cold of winter reigned on the higher part of the mountain, yet in the lower regions the heat of summer prevailed.

The artist wiped the large drops from his brow, and measured the gulf with his eyes. Then he shook his head mournfully:—it were madness to essay the desperate leap.

But, as he narrowly scrutinized the locality, his glance lingered wistfully upon the huge trunk of a withered tree, growing out, a few feet below, from the side of the abyss, over which it hung in almost a horizontal position,—like the bowsprit of a large ship.

From the end of that tree, whose appearance denoted the dread effects of the blasting lightning, there was a distance of a few feet to the opposite side of the gulf.

Nevertheless, the footing on that farther side seemed dangerous and uncertain; for the brink of the precipice was rugged, and strewn with large stones.

Otto did not hesitate long. Fixing his wallet in such a manner over his back that it might not encumber him in his perilous leap, he lowered himself down upon the trunk of the tree, and speedily clambered to its extremity.

For a moment his head appeared to turn as he glanced into the frightful gulf that yawned beneath him, and in the depths of which the torrents were madly boiling;—but without giving himself time to think of the perils that environed him, he rose up on his feet, and with one desperate bound cleared the yawning chasm.

He was now safe on the inner side of the gulf, but as he cast a look upon the opposite scene, the astounding thought suddenly struck him—how was he to get back?

To leap from the tree to the edge of the gulf was desperate enough; but to attempt to return by the same path—to endeavour to spring from the edge of the gulf to the tree, the most rabid maniac would not essay the task!

For a few moments Pianalla was cruelly oppressed by the sense of his terrible predicament; but determined not to meet despair half way, nor to anticipate in imagination the perils that he might yet have to encounter,—remembering, moreover, that there might be many other issues from the wilds of Ararat besides that dangerous path which had just afforded him an avenue to enter them,—he turned away from the chasm.

And now he commenced the ascent of another eminence, which formed as it were a mighty outwork of the huge mountain itself.

Climbing up a precipitous and dangerous path which overhung a savage-looking ravine,—bruising himself amongst the huge fragments of rock that encumbered his path,—then forcing a way through patches of thick underwood and brambles, at the risk of treading upon some venomous reptile, or encountering a wild beast,—the artist went on—on—with a settled determination of countenance and a resolute step.

From time to time a rustling in the underwood or in the dank grass made his blood run cold within him, as he thought of the deadly nature of the serpents which he thus disturbed; and often on the barren crags did his eye catch sight of the green and yellow coils of snakes basking in the sun, or playing in and out of their holes.

At length—about an hour before mid-day—the undaunted traveller reached the top of this outwork of Ararat; and, behold! another profound, wide, and fathomless chasm separated him from the acclivity of the huge mountain itself.

He sat down to rest, and partook sparingly of the provender contained in his wallet.

While he was thus engaged, he attentively scanned the scene on the opposite side of the second gulf which he had now reached. It seemed as if the mountain were surrounded by that yawning chasm!—fifty yards from the point where he stood, did the craggy acclivity appear to rise from unseen and terrible depths, wherein the waters rolled and roared with ominous din. For a considerable height the aspect of the mountain was wild, rugged, and broken into frequent masses of mighty crags;—then gradually, as the eye moved upwards, the dark



shades and sinister colours assumed a fainter and fainter hue—till at length the glance could define the point where the snow began; and higher still, the pale tints of that cheerless winter region verged into the cold blue ice—rising, mass upon mass, and forming the savage majesty of the great snowy cone seen from the plain below,—the whole surmounted by the white peaks whereon the vault of heaven itself appeared to rest!

Sublime and terrible indeed was the panorama spread before the artist's gaze; and it was amidst those wilds of aggregated rock and ice—those regions of cataract and snow, that he sought to force his way!

Having finished his meal, Pianalla again knelt down and prayed fervently; and again did he rise from his devotions, encouraged and confident.

A voice seemed to whisper promises of success in his ear; and with a spirit that faltered not, he addressed himself to the examination of his appalling path.

Pursuing his way along the edge of the mighty chasm, he suddenly perceived a sort of finger-post standing on the brink. He approached it, and saw at a second glance that it had indeed been erected by human hands; for on the transverse beam were rudely carved the following words in the Italian tongue:—

*"Lorenzo Flodoardi succeeded in reaching this point July 17th, 1463. The path which he is now about to pursue lies beneath. Let the daring adventurer who reads these words beware how he attempts a danger which must inevitably end in death; for the presence of this warning must be regarded as an indication that Lorenzo Flodoardi never returned."*

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Otto, aloud, as he contemplated the inscription, which told so sad a tale: "how hopeless appears to be my task! Lorenzo Flodoardi wrote his own epitaph, ere he plunged into the mighty tomb of Ararat! Oh! too significant warning! Had the daring Italian succeeded in his enterprise, he would have removed this memorial thereof on his return;—but, alas! its presence here shows but too well that he never came back!"

And for a few minutes Pianalla gave way to the most profound despondency. But this depression passed away; some unknown influence seemed to inspire his soul with a strange and mysterious courage; and, astonished at the feeling which now animated him, he endeavoured to ascertain the meaning of the words—"The path which he is now about to pursue lies beneath!"

Bending over the abyss, he observed an irregularity—which he had not before perceived—on the precipitous wall of the chasm; and this irregularity formed a narrow, sloping ledge—far more formidable and dangerous than the one which, as the reader may remember, had first conducted his footsteps to the convent in the Julian Alps.

Without hesitation—so resolute had now once more become his mind,—did Otto Pianalla, after recommending himself to the care of Heaven, enter upon this frightful path, which projected so little from the face of the black rock, that as he moved along, with his back against that perpendicular wall, the thickness of his body, slender as was his form, projected over the tremendous gulf into which he dared not glance.

He had not thus proceeded many yards when a sudden hissing above his head made him start in such a manner that had not a stunted shrub, projecting forth, presented itself to the desperate clutch of his hands, he would have fallen headlong into the yawning abyss. Thus clinging, and having regained his balance in a manner truly miraculous, he glanced hastily upwards;—and there—close above his head—was a hideous snake, playing in and out of a crevice in the rock, its forked tongue licking its livid jaws.

Rapidly averting his horrified look, Otto Pianalla pursued his desperate way—dragging himself on in a path which was appalling enough to descend, but which he knew could never be clambered up,—and wondering how he was ever to get back from his terrific enterprise, even if he should succeed in gaining the mountain on the opposite side of the chasm.

Still he did not altogether despair—for some secret influence appeared to sustain his courage; and though the difficulties of his steep and downward path did not increase—(how could they, without becoming absolutely insurmountable?)—they certainly did not diminish one tittle!

For half an hour did he proceed in this manner,—descending deeper and deeper into the gulf, until the

dim glimmer of a boiling torrent beneath was perceptible amidst the fathomless profundity;—and at length, to his ineffable joy, he reached a natural bridge of arched rock which stretched across the black gulf.

Although this passage was frightfully perilous—consisting only of a strip of stone, rugged and broken, and so narrow that not even a mountain goat would have crossed it in search of pasture,—Otto Pianalla boldly ventured on that path of danger.

With difficulty maintaining his balance, he advanced a few feet upon the arch; but so dizzy did he become by being compelled to fix his eyes upon the bridge, and thus glance also into the tremendous depths beneath, that he was at length forced to go upon his hands and knees to perform the passage.

His garments were rent by the rugged crags; and his flesh was torn by the rude and broken rock. But he gained the opposite side in safety; and there, instead of having to clamber up the side of the chasm, a cleft—formed by the same torrent that, in past centuries, had hollowed the rock into the shape of an arched bridge—led him into a wild ravine, surrounded by masses of crag.

But he was now at the base of the actual acclivity of Mount Ararat!

Like piles and piles of clouds collected together, rose far above him the summit of the two-headed colossus, crowned with its eternal snows!

After resting for a few minutes, Otto commenced the ascent of Ararat. For two hours did he toil upwards—clambering over walls and layers of black and rugged rock—the atmosphere becoming colder and colder as he proceeded.

It was about three in the afternoon when he reached the point where the snow began. In a few hours he had passed from the warmth of summer into the depths of winter!

But gaining fresh courage as every new difficulty was surmounted, the artist went on—on; now forcing his way amidst terrific cliffs of ice with their superincumbent snow.

And as he advanced, the chill breeze of the mountain acquired a sharpness that seemed to pierce to the very marrow of his bones.

Seldom he looked back; his thoughts were intent upon the mysteries of that summit to which every step took him nearer—nearer.

In spite of the difficulties of his journey, he proceeded with as much rapidity as possible; and thus, to some extent, combated the freezing influence of the intense chill by keeping his blood in quick circulation.

Upon gaining the higher regions of the mountain, he suddenly perceived the mouth of a dark cave, formed by one of nature's convulsions in that wild of ice and snow.

He looked upward, and saw that a tedious ascent was still before him; he, therefore, determined to repose and refresh himself for a few moments in the hollow thus presented to his view.

Entering the cave, he penetrated to a distance which the snow-drifts had not reached; and he was about to seat himself on the ground, which was as hard as marble, when, by the dim reflection of the snow outside, his horror-struck glance fell upon the features of a corpse!

Yes!—there, in that tremendous solitude, lay the body of a human being—the flesh shrunk and shrivelled, it is true—but in other respects completely preserved by the intense chill of the mountain—even as Otto had beheld the remains of the lost travellers in the Convent of the Julian Alps!

He approached the corpse; and, gazing upon the rigid leather-like countenance, marvelled who could have been the daring traveller that had thus met a premature death in those dreary regions;—for premature such a fate was, the appearance of the face being that of a man in the prime of life.

A sudden thought struck Otto; and, acting under its influence, he carefully examined the garments of the dead, to discover, if possible, any clue that might exist to show who he really was.

But there was no paper—no document to solve this mystery; and Otto was about to abandon his search, when he perceived a ring shining upon the finger of the corpse.

He endeavoured to remove it gently; but the finger broke off like brittle leather, and then crumbled to pieces.

Otto advanced to the mouth of the cave, and saw a name graven upon the large cornelian which was set in the ring.

That name was LORENZO FLDOARDI!

Accident had thus led Otto Pianalla to trace the path of a traveller, who had met his fate in those frightful regions half a century before.

Little cheered by this discovery—which almost seemed a warning and an omen—the artist resumed his way.

It was now about five o'clock in the evening, and the sun was approaching the western quadrature. But Otto was determined to make the best possible use of the few hours of daylight which remained to him.

On—on he went—climbing over the ice-crags:—higher and higher he ascended:—and in another hour he reached the point where the cleft forming the two peaks of the mountain commenced.

To his great joy, he found that the ascent of the taller peak was far more easy than he could possibly have hoped or anticipated; and his courage augmented with every step that took him nearer to the summit.

But the cold—oh! that was so sharp, so freezing, so cutting, that he cared for it even more than for the terrible dangers he had surmounted.

Another hour—a hour of wearisome toil, though of far diminished peril—passed; and, behold! the daring, intrepid man places his foot upon the summit of Mount Ararat!

He stands upon a platform, as it were, of about sixty yards square—rugged and uneven with snow-heaps on which the foot left no print, so marble-like were they.

That summit, which seemed sharp as a needle when seen from the plain below, was spacious enough to afford room for many cottages, were it possible for human beings to fix a habitation there.

And in the middle of that platform stood a large object, which at first appeared to be a vast heap of snow; but which, as Otto approached it, produced upon him solemn and awful emotions.

Yes—there indeed was the Ark, the venerable boat in which the Patriarch and his family, together with pairs of the various species of other living things, floated in safety upon the bosom of the mighty waters that inundated the world.

Impossible would it be for us to describe the feelings which animated Otto Pianalla as he approached the Ark, the outlines of whose shape were defined by the manner in which the snow covered it in around! For—strange and mysterious miracle!—the snow had fallen on it only to preserve it—and not to bury it altogether.

And then—kneeling upon the cold and hard summit of majestic Ararat—ten thousand feet above the level of the plain, which was veiled from his view by the mists that had gathered around the base of the mountain—on a spot where never mortal man was known to set his foot till then, since the day when Noah and his family went forth from the Ark—there—on that tremendous height—far, far above the yawning caverns and deep, deep abysses—there did Otto Pianalla pour forth his soul in gratitude to that Providence who had brought him safely thither!

No feeling of an impious curiosity induced him to seek to know more of the venerable Ark than his eye could gather from the outlines marked by the covering of snow—but when his prayer was accomplished, he removed a small portion of that hoary garment which enveloped the boat, and with his knife he cut away a single slip of the gopher wood whereof the Ark was formed.

Then, having carefully secured the precious relic about his person, he commenced the descent of the mountain on the same side as he had travelled to its summit.

Full of a holy confidence, and inspired with a mental and physical energy which, courageous as he naturally was, he had never felt till then, Otto Pianalla passed rapidly down the declivity.

Whether it were that his eyes now commanded an accurate view of the regions beneath—or whether, as he reverentially conceived, some superior intelligence acted as his guide—we cannot determine—true, however, is it that the descent was as nothing in its peril or in the time occupied, when compared with the ascent.

He discovered windings and defiles which enabled him to avoid those giddy ledges that ran along frightful chasms—no hideous reptiles crossed his path—no snake darted from its loathsome coil to alarm him—no hissing serpent peeped from its hole as he pursued his way.

The sun set; but the twilight was so clear and pure in its reflection from the snows of Ararat, that he proceeded in his descent without danger: and by eleven o'clock that night re-entered in safety, and with a rejoicing heart, the humble cottage of the Armenian peasants!

## CHAPTER XCI.

### THE ISLAND OF LISSA.

LISSA is a small island in the Gulf of Venice; and, at the time of which we are writing, belonged to the Duke of Ferrara.

On the western shore of Lissa stood a palace, small in extent, but elegantly fitted up, and commanding a charming view of that sea whereon the navies of Venice and Genoa wafted the commerce of the Mediterranean ports.

In consequence of the ravages of the Black Plague in Italy, the Duke and Duchess of Ferrara had removed with their splendid court to the palace of Lissa, the pestilence having visited this isle in a very mitigated form, and having disappeared at the expiration of a few weeks.

At a short distance from the palace was a strong fortress, called the Castle of Solitude, and which was used as a place of transportation and confinement for the state criminals of the Duchy of Ferrara. Thither were they conveyed under circumstances of extraordinary mystery; and rumour declared that no one whom political or private vengeance consigned to the Castle of Solitude ever lived above a week after the gates had once closed behind him. But how the prisoners were disposed of—whether by the sword of an executioner, or by poison, or by the appalling death of famine—none could say. Certain, however, was it that the inhabitants of Lissa spoke of the Castle of Solitude in a subdued tone, and with glances of mysterious horror; and few of them chose to venture near its walls after nightfall.

It was on a beautiful evening towards the end of March, 1518, that Lucreza Borgia, Duchess of Ferrara, was seated with a few of her attendant ladies, in one of the magnificent saloons of the palace.

Fifteen years and a half had passed over Lucreza's head since we saw her the inmate of the Rosenthal Castle, and that period had rather developed than impaired her almost matchless beauty.

She had grown stouter; but this exuberance of shape only augmented its voluptuousness. Her face was still angelic in expression; and her heart was, as heretofore, the seat of all the bad passions which can prompt woman to deeds of licentiousness, profligacy, and crime.

Never was there a countenance which so emphatically belied the doctrines of the physiognomist, as that of Lucreza Borgia! The Duchess and her ladies were assembled in a saloon of the palace, at Lissa, as above mentioned, and the conversation turned upon an incident which had occurred that afternoon.

It appeared that as a Venetian ship, homeward bound from Smyrna, was doubling the cape on the south-western point of the island of Lissa, it suddenly struck upon a rock, through the ignorance or neglect of the captain. The weather was, however, remarkably fine, and the sea almost as smooth as glass: the crew accordingly took to their boats, and were landed in safety at the little town on the outskirts of which the palace stood.

It was upon this occurrence that Lucreza and her ladies were conversing, when a page entered the apartment, bearing a silver tray covered with cakes, confectionery, and cooling beverages.

"Have you gleaned any further tidings concerning those shipwrecked people, Geronimo?" inquired the Duchess. "Have his Highness's commands been fully attended to?"

"To the very letter, your Highness," answered the page, with a bow. "The strangers have been generously cared for."

"'Tis well," observed Lucreza. "Venice will be grateful to us for this hospitality towards her subjects in distress; and it is politic for Ferrara to maintain herself on friendly terms with the Republic."

"Assuredly, gracious Princess," said the ladies, to whom this observation was addressed.

"Is there any hope of saving the vessel?" inquired Lucreza, after a pause.

"None, your Highness," answered Geronimo; "and the sailors are now busily engaged in landing the cargo."

"And are the passengers Venetians also?" asked Lucreza. "Haply there may be some amongst them of a fitting rank to deserve presentation at our court? For, as I ere now observed, it behoves us to manifest a kindly feeling towards the subjects of Venice."

"There were but few passengers in the Argosy, your Highness," returned the page; "and they consisted of a German family, well spoken of by the sailors of the crew. I know not whether the family be of rank or merit; indeed, the little I have heard concerning its members is

that they are on their way to Vienna, and that their name is Pianalla."

"Pianalla!" exclaimed the Duchess of Ferrara, the colour mounting to her cheeks; then, instantly subduing her emotions, she said, "Know you the Christian name of the father of this family?"

"While I was engaged in conducting them to the house which his Highness has placed at the disposal of the shipwrecked," replied the page, "I heard the German gentleman's wife call him by the name of Otto."

Lucreza made no reply; but, after partaking of some slight refreshment, left the room—declining the attendance of all her ladies, save one.

She retired to her own chamber, followed by this one favourite, who was an elderly woman, and whom Lucreza had made the confidant of her intrigues, her amours, and her crimes. To be the confidant of the Duchess of Ferrara was to become the instrument of that Princess's schemes and vices; but gold, profusely lavished, had rendered the Signora Guinaldo a willing agent, if not entirely a faithful one.

The moment Lucreza and this woman were alone together, the latter prepared herself to receive some instructions of a dark or mysterious nature; for she had not failed to observe the emotions of her mistress at the mention of Otto Pianalla's name.

Nor was the Signora mistaken.

"Good Guinaldo," said Lucreza, speaking in a thick and rapid tone; "the man, whom of all his sex I most abhor in this world, is within my power. Accident has thrown him upon this island; and I may now avenge myself for all the insults which he heaped years ago upon my head! Yes," she continued, "Otto Pianalla is in my power! And, oh! I will now teach him how terrible a thing it is to scorn—to reject the love of Lucreza Borgia! Think you, Guinaldo, that the horrors of the *Iron Coffin* will humble that proud and haughty practiser of virtue at my feet? Think you that the dread menace of the disappearing windows and collapsing walls will thaw his icy heart, and compel him to exclaim, '*Pardon me, Lucreza: I will become thy slave!*'"

"He must be more than mortal to withstand those terrors, great lady, even if he have steeled his heart against your charms!" answered the dependant.

"Say you so?" cried Lucreza, with a triumphant smile. "Then we will put the virtuous Otto to the test. And if the lapse of time have not worked a greater change in his appearance than it has in mine," she continued, surveying herself proudly in a full-length mirror that stood near—"if the beautiful youth have expanded into the fine and handsome man, then were it worth while thus to humble him; for, of all beings of the sterner sex that ever met my eyes, none has made so lasting an impression upon my heart as Otto Pianalla."

"Then, lady, shall he succumb to thee!" exclaimed Signora Guinaldo.

"You understand me!" said Lucreza, significantly. "This night must he become the inmate of the *Iron Coffin!*"

"I do understand your Highness," replied the dependant, in the same meaning tone. "Without another moment's delay will I issue the necessary instruction to Schurmann."

She then left the apartment.

But ere she had proceeded to give those secret orders which should fulfil the terrible intentions of the Duchess of Ferrara, the Signora Guinaldo obtained a private interview with the Duke, Lucreza's husband.

What passed between the dependant and that Prince will appear hereafter.

We must, however, observe that after the meeting the Signora Guinaldo executed Lucreza's instructions.

That same evening, about ten o'clock, while the Duchess was seated at the supper-table with her royal husband and the chief officers and ladies of her court, her dependant entered the room, and found an opportunity to whisper in her ear, "Otto Pianalla is at this moment an inmate of the *Iron Coffin.*"

Lucreza thanked the Signora Guinaldo with a rapid but significant glance, and continued the conversation in which she was engaged with her husband and the company present, as calmly as if nothing unusual had occurred.

## CHAPTER XCII.

### THE IRON COFFIN.

THE information given to the Duchess Lucreza by the Signor Guinaldo was indeed too true.

Otto Pianalla had strolled forth, shortly after sunset, from the house in which the shipwrecked party had been lodged by order of the Duke of Ferrara; and he bent his steps towards the shore to enjoy the refreshing breeze which the wings of the evening wafted over the deep blue waters of the Adriatic.

He was standing in a contemplative mood, upon a low reef which jutted out into the sea, when the sounds of footsteps fell upon his ears. He looked back, and beheld three men advancing towards him.

Not suspecting treachery, he again turned his eyes upon the broad expanse which lay at his feet, and in whose bosom was now reflected the gem-like lustre of a thousand stars.

But in a few moments he was seized rudely from behind: he attempted to resist—the effort was vain, for his arms were pinioned with cords in an instant;—he demanded the cause of this outrage—and his question elicited no answer.

The three men performed their work in dogged silence. Having securely bound Otto's arms, they led him away along the sea-shore for a considerable distance, so as to avoid the outskirts of the town; and at length they turned abruptly into a narrow path which ran through a thick grove situated upon a somewhat steep acclivity.

Otto endeavoured to learn the motive of his arrest: and he appealed to the men to satisfy him upon that head.

But they uttered not a word in reply!

When the uppermost verge of the grove was gained, the black and gloomy towers of the Castle of Solitude were seen at a short distance, standing out in dark relief against the star-lit horizon.

Otto sighed as he beheld that sombre fortress of which he had already heard enough to arouse the worst fears in his mind;—and a tear trembled upon his dark lash as he thought of his wife and children.

Then he reproached himself for giving way to that temporary depression, instead of putting his faith in the supreme power which had so often led him safely through dangers of a menacing and even an appalling nature.

In a quarter of an hour the entrance of the castle was reached; and the gate was opened by a man carrying a torch.

The light streamed upon the countenance of Otto's guards; and it struck the artist that the features of one of those persons were not altogether unknown to him.

He examined this individual more attentively, and at length recognised Schurmann, whom he had seen in the tribunal of justice at Vienna, on the occasion when the Baron of Czernin's affairs were brought before the notice of the court.

"Schurmann," said Otto, in a low voice, "what injury have I ever done to you?"

The person thus addressed made no reply: indeed, he gave no indication that the words were heard by him at all.

The ominous silence in which his guards thus shrouded themselves was calculated to inspire the prisoner with the most gloomy forebodings; and he prayed inwardly, as he accompanied them along a series of stone passages, lighted only by the lurid glare of the torch—he prayed, to prepare himself for death!

At the end of the last passage which they thus traversed Schurmann opened a low door, which was provided outside with massive bolts, padlocks, and chains.

The cords were now removed from Otto's arms; and he was thrust into the dungeon to which that well-defended door gave admittance.

A moment afterwards, and the ominous clanking of the bolts and chains fell upon his ears.

He sat down on the straw which littered the floor of the dungeon, and, amidst the almost total darkness in which he was plunged, began to meditate sorrowfully upon his condition.

What would his beloved wife and darling children think of his sudden and unaccountable absence? Oh! the idea of their terrible suspense was almost insupportable; and even the virtuous—the heaven-confiding Otto was now reduced to the brink of despair.

And for what fate was he reserved? For death, perhaps! But by what means was his end to be accomplished? Not by sudden violence—not by the bravo's knife;—or else wherefore should his enemies have conveyed him thither? Alas! was famine—was starvation to be his doom? He feared so!

But who were his enemies? Had he only one, or many?

He knew that Lucreza Borgia was the Duchess of Ferrara, and that she was then at the palace of Lissa with the royal court;—but surely—surely she could not be his persecutress? Had he not saved her brother from a dungeon—at the peril of finding one himself? No—Lucreza could not be his enemy! And yet—and yet, who would dare to perpetrate this outrage beneath the very eyes, as it were, of the Duke and Duchess to whose rule the island, with its fortress, belonged!

Terrible uncertainty!—bewildering suspense!

As Otto sate, thus ruminating, upon the straw of his cell, his eyes gradually became more accustomed to the obscurity; and a light dawned upon him by very slow degrees, and so faintly that when its presence first struck him he doubted whether it was not an optical delusion.

But, as he gazed—and gazed with straining eyes, he became convinced that there were really windows along the top of that side or wall of the dungeon towards which his face was turned.

Yes—he could now count those windows, guarded with their massive iron bars.

There were five; and they formed a range, separated only from each other by very narrow divisions.

The door was in the side facing the windows.

Otto rose from his straw, and endeavoured to raise himself up to the casements; but they were too high to reach with a spring, and there was not a single projection to break the surface of the wall.

And that wall—and the other walls of the dungeon—oh! there was no possibility of mistaking the nature of the material of which they were made; for as Otto passed his hand over them, the cold touch of iron sent a chill to his very heart's core!

In what kind of a place, then, was he? He examined it more closely with his eyes and hands; and he was speedily struck by the extraordinary shape of that dungeon.

Very long and very narrow, it at first appeared to him a section cut off from a passage by building two partition walls across it: but, no—the side walls were not straight!

More closely—more attentively still did he examine the dungeon; and at last—with his blood curdling in his veins—was he forced to stop at the horrible conviction that the dungeon was built in the shape of a coffin!

Yes: he was enclosed in an iron coffin—at one end of which was the door, and at the other the five windows!

"Oh! my beloved wife—my dearest children, am I separated from you for ever?" exclaimed Otto Pianalla, falling upon his knees in the midst of that dungeon of a shape so appallingly foreboding. "Great Father of Mercy, wilt thou make her so soon a widow—and them fatherless so young? But in thee I place my trust: thy will be done!"

Then from his bosom he drew forth a small box of sandal-wood, and piously kissed the relic which it contained.

That relic was the wood of the Ark!

Then he lay down, and endeavoured to court slumber; for he was fearful of trusting himself alone with his thoughts. Sleep soon fell upon him; and his dreams were to some extent cheering. The nature of those visions was pervaded by the idea of his confinement in that horrible dungeon; but amidst the gloom of this strange and mysterious immurement, his imagination caught glimpses of hope and scintillations of eventual idiocy.

He was thus hovering, in his slumbers, between the sad reality of the present and the brighter anticipations of the future, when the loud crashing sound of a bell awoke him with a terrific start.

That bell appeared to ring upon the very roof of the iron dungeon, the metallic echoes of which responded with a din as if the sides—the floor—and the ceiling vibrated long and perceptibly to the sudden clang.

The bell, however, beat but once; though the humming sound continued to ring for more than a minute in the artist's ear.

It was morning; and the interior of the dungeon was now plainly visible in respect to all the ominous features of its shape. The light that prevailed within was of that dim nature which precedes the sun-rise by nearly half an hour. Yet the sun has already risen;—but then the windows were so small, the horn of which the panes were made was so dull in hue, and the iron bars were so thick, that even at mid-day no better light could penetrate into that living tomb!

When the first bewildering effects of the sudden clang of the bell had passed away, Otto's eyes wandered round

and round the dungeon—as if he could scarcely believe that a portion of what had followed him in his dreams was really true,—as if the horrors of his position had just burst upon him for the first time, in all their appalling forms and colours!

But when he had poured forth his matin-prayer, he grew calmer, and then surveyed the dungeon with more tranquil attention.

Glancing first towards the door, he beheld some light object projecting as it were from the middle: he approached that point, and, to his surprise and joy, discovered a small loaf and a pitcher of water standing upon a sort of shelf attached to the door. On a closer examination, he observed that there was a small trap, or wicket, in the door, opening just above the shelf, and by means of which the food had been introduced from outside.

"Heaven be thanked!" cried Otto: "then I am not doomed to die of famine!"

Returning, with the loaf and the jug, to his straw in the middle of the dungeon, the artist sate down, and ate and drank sparingly—for he knew not how long a period might elapse ere the provision would be renewed.

But as his eyes wandered round the horrible place from time to time, he was suddenly startled by a circumstance which he had not before noticed during the half hour that had now elapsed since he was awakened by the bell.

This circumstance was connected with the range of windows. He felt convinced that on the preceding night he had counted five—counted them over and over again,—remarked them, in a word, most attentively!

And now there were but four!

Was this possible? Could he have been deceived on the previous night? or was he deluded now?

He advanced nearer to the wall which contained the windows—nearer to what might be called *the head of the coffin*;—and, surely enough, there were but four windows!

It was clear, then, that he had been deceived in his computation the night before: at least he thought so!

The four windows formed a range all across the top of the wall; and if there had been originally five, the removal or filling up of one must have caused a blank space somewhere along that range.

But there was no such space—the range was uniform, extending from angle to angle along the head of the coffin!

Oh! how shall we attempt to describe the gloom and weariness—the intervals of soul-crushing thoughts, succeeded by others of prayer and hope—which characterized the passage of that long, long day? Not a sound from without broke upon the awful silence of the dungeon; not a human voice, nor a human footstep—not even the notes of a bell proclaiming the hour,—no—nor the chirrup of a bird on the ledge of the casements, met the ear of the prisoner!

Night came at last—and he determined to watch at the door of the dungeon, to appeal to the person who might bring him food.

There he took his station, keeping his hand fixed upon the panel of the iron door, to ascertain the moment when the wicket was about to be opened—so fearful was he of losing the opportunity of addressing himself to a human soul.

But hour after hour passed; and no one came:—the panel moved not—his food was not renewed. And yet but a morsel of the loaf and but a drop of the water remained to him!

Wearied with watching—and reduced almost to despair by the thought of his wife and children—and now assailed by the horrible idea that his provisions were to be supplied so scantily and at such distant intervals, that a lingering death of slow famine must be his fate,—Otto Pianalla once more threw himself upon his knees, prayed fervently, and shortly after sank into a deep slumber.

His dreams were again to some degree of a cheering nature; and again were they suddenly and cruelly interrupted by the iron clang of the deafening bell.

But this time it beat twice!

Otto started up, and glanced rapidly round the dungeon—or rather from end to end; for it seemed to have grown narrower!

Yes—and, as he gazed, it also appeared to have become shorter; for the straw in the middle struck him as being nearer to the walls every way.

But food—food!—for he was hungry! And, behold—upon the little shelf projecting from the door were a loaf and another pitcher of water.

"Again do I thank Heaven that famine is not to be my

fate!" exclaimed Otto. "But for what purpose am I here? is it to linger in solitude, until the lonely captivity of long, long years shall hurl my reason from its seat? Oh! death were preferable to that! Ah!—what do I see?"

He uttered these last words with a species of agonising scream—for his eyes had wandered towards the windows, of which there were but *three*!

Starting from the straw, he hastened to examine the wall in which the windows were set. It was now so narrow that when he stretched out his arms, his hands touched the angles where the sides of the coffin joined the head.

But still the windows—the three remaining windows were uniform as a range: there was no blank space in any part. The sides, then, had grown closer to each other: yes—yes—he could now doubt the fact no longer!

And not only had the windows diminished in number;—they were lower than when he first entered that dreadful place! Still, the top of the range touched the ceiling—touched the lid of the iron coffin!

Could all this be a delusion? was he already turning mad?

No—no; he was sane—too sane to be deceived any longer as to the appearances which now struck terror to his inmost soul! For on the first night of his captivity, he was unable to reach the bottom of the windows even with a leap;—but at present he could touch the massive iron bars of the casements without so much as standing upon tip-toe.

And the roof—oh! that had become lower: it had descended with the windows!

Horrible ideas flashed to his mind:—those walls would collapse—that roof would descend—and his form was destined to be crushed to atoms in that iron coffin!—Or else the walls and the roof would only approach each other at such a distance, as to form the cell into the precise size, as it was already in the shape, of a coffin,—and thus would he be, as it were, buried alive!

Merciful God! was such to be his fate?

Recovering from the first access of despair, Otto Pianalla knelt down, and prayed fervently—fervently—more fervently, if possible, than he had ever yet prayed; and he rose in a state of mind considerably calmed—but, alas! calmed only with that resignation which nerves a good man to meet approaching death.

Wearily, wearily passed the second day; and the third night arrived.

So overcome with the fatigue of intense meditation was he, that—abandoning the idea of again watching at the wicket—he threw himself upon the straw, and slept profoundly.

But, in his slumbers, a strange vision visited him.

He thought that some being, of undefined shape and mien, appeared to him—there, in that dungeon—and offered him liberty—long life—pleasure—power—happiness of all kinds, upon one condition, which this mysterious, vague, and dream-like visitant hesitated to name. But Otto pressed him to declare the terms on which these boons were offered; for the artist longed to embrace his wife and children again. Then it seemed to him as if the being leant over him, and whispered in his ear words of so terrible—so appalling a nature,—conditions of so fearful a kind,—that he started up wildly, and commanded the fiend to begone. Yet the shade appeared to linger; whereupon Otto instinctively drew forth the holy relic of the Ark, and by that precious symbol of God's mercy adjured the demon to depart.

At that instant the dreadful bell upon the roof sounded,—once—twice—thrice!

Otto's senses were so bewildered that for some minutes he knew not where he was—what that deafening clang, three times sent forth, could mean.

But as his ideas gradually became more clear and collected, all the horrors of his situation and all the details of his dream recurred to his memory.

Then how great was his astonishment—how profound his awe, when he found himself actually holding in his right hand the little box that contained the relic of the sacred gopher wood!

Had he really been the object of hell's temptation? Had it indeed been proposed to him to barter his soul for liberty, power, and long life?

He entertained a horrible suspicion—almost amounting to a conviction—that such was the fact; and he thanked Heaven for having provided him with the means to repel the advances of the Tempter.

Then he glanced towards the windows, and averted his eyes with a cold shudder—averted his eyes from the two remaining windows!

He rose from the straw—but his head came in contact with the ceiling, which had now sunk so low, that he could not stand upright in the dungeon!

There, however, upon the little shelf of the door, were the loaf and the pitcher of water, which had been supplied to him while he slept.

"Two windows remaining!" mused Otto to himself, while his heart seemed ready to burst as the images of his wife and children flitted before him. "The bell struck once when the first disappeared—twice when two were gone—and three times when the collapsing walls covered the third! To-morrow it will strike four—and the morning after, five; and then doubtless my doom will be sealed! By whose command do I thus suffer? who is the enemy that has destined me thus to die? Surely no human being possesses a heart so fiend-like—unless it be indeed the Borgia? Yes—yes; Lucreza, this is your work;—you seek to punish me for the firmness with which I refused to become the slave of your passions at Rosenthal Castle long ago! Oh! I comprehend it all;—for thou, Lucreza, art the only living being capable of such atrocity as this! But, if it be the will of Heaven that I die thus, prayers, and not curses, shall mark my last agonising moments!"

It was not, however, without feelings of ineffable horror that Otto surveyed the limited dimensions of that dungeon which now seemed more coffin-like than ever. By whatever strange contrivance it were that those walls were thus made to collapse, and that roof to fall lower, it was impossible to deny that never had infernal cruelty designed a more ingenious method of crushing the spirit by degrees, and the body perhaps in an instant when the time should come.

In the widest part of the iron coffin Otto could now easily touch each side with his extended arms; and at the foot, or lower end, it was so narrow that the door alone at present occupied that space.

The fourth night came; and Otto feared to sleep, lest the temptations of hell should be renewed. But he could not walk about—for his head touched the ceiling when he stood upright. He therefore sate upon the straw, and passed the weary, tedious hours in prayer. When, according to the calculation which he made of the lapse of time, light was approaching, he maintained his eyes steadily fixed upon the point where the two remaining windows had stood on the previous day. And soon—by degrees a faint glimmer was perceptible at the head of the iron coffin: then, when the dim ray had somewhat increased in power, the bell suddenly beat—sounding now as if it were just over the hapless prisoner's head, while the iron walls and roof vibrated terrifically with the rebound.

One—two—three—four;—and as the fourth clang fell on Otto's ear, the side against which he was leaning moved noiselessly, but firmly and steadily, inwards. He uttered a loud cry, and flung up his arms in terror;—but his hands encountered the roof, which had now sunk to the level of his head, even as he sate upon the straw.

Instinctively his eyes, a moment averted, were turned again towards the head of the coffin; and the dim light shone upon him through the one remaining window!

"To-morrow—to-morrow!" he cried, clasping his hands together;—"and all will be over! Oh! my dear, dear wife—my beloved sons!"

And he wept bitterly.

Those tears relieved him—as much as a man in his awful situation could be relieved; and, perceiving that his food had not been forgotten, he crept along the coffin to the door, now so narrow that a stout person could not have passed through it.

The shelf was still precisely in the middle—for admirably arranged seemed the fearful mechanism which produced those strange collapses of the coffin's sides and lid, that the precise position of its salient features remained unchanged in reference to each diminished shape.

Firmly impressed with the idea that this was his last day, Otto passed it in the way which the reader, who has studied his character, may conceive; and when night—the fifth night—came, he no longer feared to lie down to rest; for he felt himself nerved to resist all the temptations of hell—were they never so powerful!

## CHAPTER XCIII.

### THE LAST STROKE OF THE BELL.

Yes—the fifth night had arrived; and Otto Pianalla lay down upon his straw, with the conviction that when the bell should ring in the morning as a signal for the fifth window to disappear, the walls and roof would grasp him



in their arms of iron, and enclose him in that coffin of diabolical contrivance.

It was not death that he feared;—but he sorrowed to think that his family was destined to remain in a frightful state of ignorance as to his real fate,—perhaps supported for years and years upon the hope that he might return to them,—until, the heart becoming sick, the very duties of life would seem poisoned, and the end of those whom he loved so devotedly might become painful in the extreme.

In the midst of such reflections as these, he was suddenly startled by a sound—the first save that of the bell and of his own cries which had yet met his ear in the dungeon—emanating from the door.

He listened—listened in the most acute suspense.

Yes; it was indeed a sound as of a trap opening;—and immediately afterwards a strong current of air dissipated the almost stifling heat of the iron coffin.

"Otto Pianalla!" said a melodious voice.

Years had passed since the artist had heard those tones;—but he remembered them well—for the voice of Lucreza Borgia was one of silvery softness.

"Am I indeed, then, the victim of your Highness?" asked Otto. "Oh! is human nature capable of such black ingratitude? Hast thou forgotten, false woman, all I did for thy brother Cæsar?"

"Lucreza Borgia forgets nothing," was the calm reply: "not even how Otto Pianalla scorned her love in the Castle of Rosenthal. Prond and obdurate man! didst thou not then see me at thy feet—and didst thou not shrink from me as from a viper? Didst thou not even take upon thyself to reproach me for my crimes? But enough of that:—I am not come to reproach—I am here to save thee, if thou wilt."

"Can you ask me if I wish to escape from this horrible prison?" exclaimed Otto, joyfully. "Oh! release me, madam—restore me to my wife and children—let me embrace them once more—and I will pray for thee—I will even speak of thee with gratitude!"

"It is not gratitude that I seek at the hands of Otto Pianalla," answered Lucreza: "it is love!"

"Oh! would you impose conditions upon me as the price of my release?" cried the artist. "Then know, bad woman, that sooner shall these walls crush me to a shapeless mass,—sooner shall this roof fall down this instant on the head which it already touches, even as I speak to thee,—yes—sooner will I die the most horrible of deaths than yield to thy desires!"

"Think not, haughty man," returned Lucreza, "that your death there will be immediate! Oh! no—that were a mercy too great for those whom the state-vengeance of Ferrara or my own private hatred sends to this living tomb! No:—shouldst thou scorn me now, as thou didst sixteen years ago in the Castle of Rosenthal, prepare thyself for a fate the horrors of which no tongue can describe! For when the fifth sound of to-morrow's bell falls on thine ears, the walls and the roof will move so near each other that they will enclose thee in a space neither a whit larger nor a tittle smaller than thy coffin would be were it duly prepared to receive thy corpse. Therein wilt thou linger for days and days—a prey to starvation—feeding on the flesh of thine hands and arms—and with all the terrific consciousness which can aggravate the hellish torments of thy doom. Otto Pianalla, have I moved thee now?"

"No—no—fiend, and not woman, as thou art!" was he agonising reply. "Avaunt—leave me! I will not yield to thee—go!"

"Then perish in thine obstinacy!" replied Lucreza; and the trap was immediately closed in the door.

But almost at the same moment the trampling of many feet and the sounds of angry voices fell upon Otto's ears: the bolts and bars of the iron coffin were drawn back—the chains fell with a heavy clank upon the pavement outside—the door was thrown open—lights appeared in the passage—and a loud voice exclaimed, in a commanding tone, "Otto Pianalla, come forth! Thou art free!"

It is beyond the power of language to describe how joyously this invitation was obeyed—how the despair of Otto Pianalla was in a moment changed into the most fervent heart-thrilling delight!

Passing out from the iron coffin, the artist found himself in the presence of an elderly man of noble and imposing aspect, and in whom, by the star that he wore upon his breast, he had no difficulty in recognising the Duke of Ferrara.

The Duchess Lucreza was a prisoner between two of the ducal guards:—Schurmann was also in custody;—and close behind the Duke stood the Signora Guinaldo.

Lucreza's countenance was ashy pale; but it was evident that she endeavoured as much as possible to conceal her emotions beneath an affectation of haughty indifference.

"Return at once to your family, excellent man," cried the Duke, addressing himself to Pianalla; "but fear not that they have been in sorrow at your absence. Scarcely were you the inmate of this castle, when a message from me relieved them of all anxiety on your account; and an innocent falsehood conveyed to them a reasonable excuse for your separation from them for a few days."

"A thousand thanks, my lord, for this kind consideration on your part!" cried Otto, overjoyed at intelligence so welcome.

"And pardon me," continued the Duke, taking the artist's hand, "if I have allowed you to languish thus long in such horrible suspense as you must have endured. But I required confirmation of that profligacy which I had long suspected—a profligacy on the part of a woman whom, in spite of the ill report of her early life, I raised to be a partner of my ducal throne. Yes, Lucreza—what have become of all the pledges of fidelity which you made me, when—dazzled by your beauty, overlooking your former errors, and willing to believe your representations that report had exaggerated your failings into enormous crimes—I led you to the altar? But know, vile woman, that you have been betrayed by your own bad agent—your own confidant; and that those words which you ere now uttered to this high-minded man, who nobly refused to purchase life with dishonour, have at length confirmed my long-existing suspicions!"

Lucreza darted a furious glance at the Signora Guinaldo, but made no reply to the accusations and reproaches of her husband.

"In reference to you, Guinaldo," continued the Duke, "you have my pledge for your safety;—and you may depart! And you, vile tool of an abandoned princess," he added, turning towards Schurmann, "imprisonment in the Castle of Solitude shall be thy fate! Guards, away with him!"

The Signora Guinaldo had already disappeared; and the soldiers hastened to conduct Schurmann to one of the deepest dungeons in the Castle of Solitude.

"Messer Pianalla, I have naught more to say to you," observed the Duke; "unless it be that I have placed at your disposal a vessel to convey yourself and family to any port whither it may suit your purposes to repair. Farewell—and forget what you have seen or endured within these walls!"

"Your Highness will pardon me," said Otto, glancing towards Lucreza, "if I venture to implore your mercy in favour of one who—wicked and depraved though she be—"

"Messer Pianalla," interrupted the Duke, sternly, "seek not to place thyself between me and the execution of my sovereign justice. Again I bid thee farewell!"

But Otto still lingered—for, much as he had suffered at the hands of Lucreza Borgia, he revolted from the idea of the punishment which he feared was in store for her. The Duke perceived his hesitation; and, stamping his foot with rage, cried, "Dost hear? Begone!"

The guards seized upon the artist, and conducted him through the long passages and windings that led to the gate of the Castle of Solitude.

A few minutes after he had thus been removed from the presence of the Duke, the iron coffin received another victim!

Unmoved by her prayers and entreaties—inexorable against her tears and supplications—for the haughty Lucreza was humbled to the dust when the fiat of her husband went forth—the Duke remained upon the spot while the guards thrust the screaming, wretched, despairing woman into the horrible prison.

Yes—and with the true malignity of the dark Italian vengeance of that age, the Duke quitted not the entrance of the iron coffin throughout the night! And when the first beam of the sun appeared above the eastern hills and grove-topped heights of Lissa, the fearful machinery was set in motion.

Clang—clang went the deafening bell upon the dungeon roof:—five times it struck—while appalling shrieks came from within the living tomb.

And while the echoes of the fifth stroke were yet reverberating through the gloomy passages of the Castle of Solitude, the mysterious engine of death began its dreadful work.

On—on went the closing sides: down—down came the ponderous roof—the fatal machinery no longer moving noiselessly, but collapsing with a hideous crash—yet not

so loud as to stifle the agonizing screams and shrieks that echoed from the inmate of the iron coffin!

## CHAPTER XCIV.

### THE TALISMAN.

SIX weeks had elapsed since the fearful incidents connected with the iron coffin in the Castle of Solitude; and it was now the middle of May, 1513.

The plague had disappeared from Vienna; but mourning, desolation, and woe had been left behind—destined, alas! long to continue.

For one half of the population had been swept away; and almost every family wore the sad and sombre garments denoting the absence of dear relatives—that absence which has no return!

It was in the evening of a charming day that Otto Pianalla, having seen his wife and well-beloved sons safely installed in their dwelling, once more repaired to the mansion of the Count of Aurana.

When he alighted from his horse at the gate, he was struck by the melancholy cloud which overhung the countenance of the old porter who received him.

To the artist's hasty question as to the cause of that gloom, the reply was sorrowful indeed.

The Countess of Aurana was no more!

Alas! Theresa had become one of the first victims of that pestilence which had been brought upon her native land by the dread command of her husband. She had died suddenly—cut off in a moment by the lightning-stroke of death,—without the warning of physical symptoms, but not mentally unprepared to meet her Maker face to face.

No: for so pure was her heart—so spotless had been her life, that it needed but the removal of her soul from its earthly tenement to the eternal mansions of heaven, to place her amongst the hierarchy of angels.

She had died, too, in happy ignorance of all the terrible circumstances which belonged to the career of the husband whom she had ever loved so fondly,—in ignorance alike of his compact with Satan, and of the deep mystery of the Chamber of the Cradle!

But Faust—what were his feelings?

The torture of his soul was as a foretaste of that hell to which he had doomed himself;—and in the wildness of his grief, he declared that he was the murderer of Theresa. That self-accusation was not however understood by those around him: it was considered to be the outburst of a mind almost maddened by the heavy affliction thus sustained;—for as the Countess had died of the plague, and the cause of her sudden end was too fearfully apparent to create the slightest doubt as to its real nature, no one could for an instant believe that her husband was at all implicated in the authorship of the lamentable catastrophe.

The beauteous Adela, who deemed that in Theresa's death she had lost a mother, shed bitter tears of anguish over the corpse of her supposed parent; and in spite of the terrors of contagion, the affectionate girl had knelt and prayed by the remains of the plague-stricken lady, until the death-cart came to remove the corpse.

Nor was Adela alone in the performance of that holy duty; for her lover—the youthful Maximilian—persisted in daring the same perils as his betrothed, vowing that if death placed his rude hand upon her, the blow should be fatal to them both.

The Archduke Leopold and the Archduchess Maria were also deeply afflicted at the loss of their friend; but they were compelled to restrain as much as possible the expression of their own grief in order to console Maximilian and Adela.

The plague was to some extent capricious in its inflictions: in several cases it struck but a single victim in a household;—and this remarkable principle of its nature was evidenced in respect to the château of Aurana, where Theresa alone perished beneath the pestiferous breath of the Great Mortality.

Several months had elapsed since the death of the Countess of Aurana, when Otto Pianalla reached the mansion, and learnt the sad tidings for the first time.

He dropped a tear to the memory of that amiable lady, and sought an immediate interview with Faust.

The unhappy man was in a retired apartment of the dwelling, when he received the intimation that Otto Pianalla had returned. He desired that the artist might be immediately conducted to his presence; and during the few minutes that elapsed ere they met, the suspense of the Count was dreadful in the extreme.

But at length they were alone together.

"I have succeeded," said Otto, in a solemn tone: "your son is saved!"

"Oh! that I dared to offer up thanksgiving for this happy result of your perilous journey!" exclaimed Faust, now experiencing the most joyous feelings which he had known for many—many years. "But to you, generous—excellent man, I can pour forth my gratitude without fear! And that gratitude—ah! no words can express it—no human tongue can convey an idea of its magnitude!"

"I require no thanks, Faust," replied Otto Pianalla: "my reward exists here!"—and he placed his hand upon his breast. "I will not waste time in acquainting you with those perils which I had to encounter—those difficulties which, often appearing unsurmountable, were, by the aid of Providence, at length overcome. Be it sufficient for you to know that I have stood upon the summit of Mount Ararat—that I have touched the sacred Ark—and that the holy relic is at this moment in my possession. An important duty have we now to perform: those dear children must be made acquainted with the secrets of their birth. The parents of Adela must likewise be informed that in loving her they love their own daughter; and that in giving her to Maximilian, they bestow their treasure upon your son! But this is not all," continued Otto: "Maximilian must be informed of the necessity of wearing this relic about his person until he shall have passed the age of twenty-four."

"Will you, then, acquaint him with the dread secret of his father's appalling destiny?" demanded Faust, turning deadly pale.

"Not to its full extent," answered Otto, in an emphatic tone. "Much as I abhor duplicity and dissimulation—much as I shrink from aught bordering upon falsehood—I will not embitter the future years of that excellent young man's life by communicating the dreadful history of his sire in all its most terrific incidents. No; the secret of the Chamber of the Cradle must be revealed; but the motive of your crime in changing the children shall be ascribed to your boundless ambition, which aimed at securing a princely rank for your own son!"

"Oh! again I thank thee, Otto—most sincerely thank thee for this forbearance!" exclaimed Faust. "But the relic—the relic of the Ark—how wilt thou induce my Maximilian to wear it constantly about his person?"

"Hast thou any memento of thy deceased wife?" asked Otto, after a few minutes' reflection: "a ring—a brooch—a lock of her hair?"

"I have one of those long shining tresses which were wont," said Faust, "to flow upon Theresa's shoulders, the sport of every zephyr, ere the breath of the plague blighted a flower so pure and beautiful that the world may never see its like again."

"Give me that tress," cried Otto, joyfully. "I will forthwith have the hair set in a talisman, the workmanship of which shall enclose a morsel of the sacred gopher wood;—and at the same moment when I reveal to your Maximilian the secret of his birth, I will present him the jewel, saying, 'Wear this unceasingly by day and by night, in remembrance of your departed mother; it is a talisman against evil; and if you lay it aside even for an instant, you will prove yourself unworthy the love with which your deceased parent now surveys you from on high.'"

"Be it so, good Otto," cried Faust. "And now we must part—perhaps for ever! But, no; on the eve of the fatal day—that day which must be my last—I will visit thee in Vienna. On the 31st day of July, 1517, thou mayst expect me!"

Otto was about to reply; but the unhappy man, whose countenance was ghastly pale, and whose quivering lips denoted the anguish of his soul, burst from the hold of the artist.

"Stay—for one moment stay!" exclaimed Otto: "at least embrace your son!"

"No—no!—I dare not!" answered Faust.

His hand was already upon the door-latch: and as he spoke he turned towards Otto a countenance the ineffable expression of which was never afterwards forgotten by him who thus beheld that fearful index of the doomed soul.

In another moment he disappeared.

Pianalla clasped his hands together, fell upon his knees, and prayed fervently.

## CHAPTER XCV.

### SATAN'S OWN.

It was the 31st of July, 1517.

The sun had just set, after a career of unclouded

splendour, when a traveller stopped at the gate of Otto Pianalla's dwelling in Vienna.

His dress denoted negligence; his countenance was pale as death;—his eyes rolled in their sockets with a kind of insane restlessness and horrified glare;—and his tall form was bowed by the weight of affliction.

Otto Pianalla, who had been awaiting his arrival in a state of deep suspense, and who had witnessed from the window his approach towards the house, hastened to receive the way-worn traveller upon the threshold.

Not a word was spoken between them, as the artist conducted his visitor to the most retired chamber in the dwelling; and there, when the door was closed, the traveller threw himself upon a sofa, exclaiming, "I have kept my word, Otto: I am here on the eve of my last day!"

"And is it indeed true, Faust," exclaimed Pianalla, "that to-morrow—to-morrow—"

"Satan will claim his own!" added Faust, in a voice so mournful—oh! so mournful, that never before nor afterwards did such tones of despair,—dark, deep, unutterable despair,—meet the ears of mortal man. "Yes," continued Faust, "my career is about to terminate—that career which has been so varied, and which, but for thee, would have plunged in endless ruin the immortal soul of my own beloved son!"

"And that son is now happy in the possession of a charming wife," returned Otto; "as happy as he can be—or will ever be—with the knowledge that his father perpetrated a great crime—"

"Yes—the crime of the Chamber of the Cradle!" ejaculated Faust, hastily: "but he knows not the dread secret of his father's doom? Speak, Otto—say—hast thou violated thy pledge to me? hast thou imparted to Maximilian—"

"No," interrupted the artist, emphatically: "I have kept my word; and when thou art no more, one being will alone remain the depositor of thy appalling secret!"

"I thank thee, Otto," returned Faust. "If there be a gleam of consolation for a wretch so lost—so fallen—so miserable as myself, it exists in the conviction that my fate will remain unknown to him who must continue to bear my accursed name. From the moment that I parted with you a little more than four years ago, I have been a wanderer upon the face of the earth,—at one time availing myself of that awful power which I possess, to conjure up scenes of enchantment and delight wherein to drown, if possible, the cares that weigh so heavily upon me,—at another seeking the solitude of hideous deserts and pathless forests where no other human foot had ever trod, as if I could thus fly from the dreadful phantoms of my own thoughts. But, alas!—alas! all my endeavours to obtain a moment's peace have been unavailing; and now—now—I touch at last on the threshold of my doom!"

"Faust," exclaimed Otto, painfully excited, "thou canst not thus resign thyself to Satan! Oh! let me summon hither a priest—a pious, holy man, who will pray with thee, and counsel thee;—or else hasten thou to take refuge in the sanctuary of the Redeemer—to cling to the altar—to join with me in hymns of supplication and contrition—"

"Peace, Otto!" cried Faust, his countenance convulsed, and his whole frame actually writhing with the violence of inward emotions: "you know not what you say! Oh! not for a single instant can I venture to anticipate my doom. A few hours yet remain to me—and so greedy am I now of each moment in those hours, that by no desperate act of mine will I place my soul in the power of Satan even a second before the appointed time. Speak not of hope—there is none for me! But tell me about my son. Does he wear the talisman which contains the sacred relic?"

"It never leaves him," answered Otto. "Fastened to his neck by a strong riband, it is always near his heart; and its holy influence has endowed his mind with a placid resignation that even assuages his grief on account of thee! But he prays for thy welfare: morning and night he raises his voice to Heaven to implore blessings upon the head of his father, whom he believes to have retired to a cloister."

"And let him remain in that belief!" cried Faust, in an impassioned tone; "oh! let him remain in that belief, Otto—I implore thee!"

"Not so," answered Pianalla; "for it is better that he should know that you are no more, than exist in uncertainty as to your real fate. If your doom be indeed at hand—"

"It is! it is!" ejaculated Faust, wildly.

"Then must it be my painful duty to acquaint him with

your decease," observed Otto; "and that sad task will I accomplish in a manner which shall encourage no evil suspicion in his mind."

"And this you promise solemnly to a man whom you may regard as upon his death-bed?" said Faust, his voice now becoming hollow and unearthly.

"I swear to act as I have declared!" replied Otto, emphatically.

"Tis well. And now one more question:—Does the Archduke curse my name for the treachery of which I was guilty? Does the Archduchess speak of me with loathing and abhorrence?"

"Oh! no—no—far from that!" exclaimed Otto. "The Archduchess was too much rejoiced that the mystery of the Chamber of the Cradle should have been cleared up, to think of uttering reproaches against you! She has since been able embrace her daughter without the distressing idea of loving the child of other parents better than her own offspring. Moreover, she and her noble husband possess generous and forgiving hearts; and they even sought and obtained the mercy of the Emperor in behalf of the surviving physician who was implicated in the fraud. The nurse died of the plague; but Doctor Lutzen confessed all, and was punished only by banishment from the imperial dominions for ever."

"I am satisfied with all you have done," said Faust. "You have been a generous friend to the most wretched of men;—but, then, you yourself are all that human virtue and mortal goodness can possibly be! We must now separate, Otto; for I would pass the last few hours of my existence alone. For this night shall I trespass on your hospitality; and to-morrow—"

The wretched man could say no more: he suddenly became convulsed with grief—overwhelmed with despair.

Vainly did the artist seek to console him;—alas! there was no solace for Satan's Own!

Faust pointed imperatively and earnestly towards the door: the artist understood the meaning of the doomed one, and retired with a heavy heart.

Throughout that awful night Otto Pianalla never ceased to pray!

## EPILOGUE.

It was the hour of sunrise.

Two forms stood upon the summit of Mount Vesuvius, from the depths of whose crater rose a black and dense smoke.

Those beings were the Demon and Faust.

The fiend's countenance was no longer tinged with an air of melancholy; neither was it marked by that lurking expression of mingled contempt and irony which had so often characterised him when he was his victim's slave.

His face was now appalling to behold—for every feature was invested with the terrors of hell. The eyes appeared to burn, and to shoot forth lightning glances; the triumph of infernal despotism sat on his haughty brow; and his lips were curled with a malignity which denoted how inveterate was his hate towards the seed of woman!

Faust shrank in horror from the dread countenance which was now turned upon him; and every chord in his heart vibrated as if those fibres were about to crack and burst, when the awful voice of the Demon rolled like thunder upon his ears.

"The moment is approaching, Faust," said the Demon, in that dreadful tempest-tone, "when I shall bear thee as a victim to those realms which thou didst once visit as a spectator. But ere I take thee thither, listen to the last words that will ever fall on thy mortal ears. Thinkest thou that I was duped by thine attempt to cheat me of thy son? thinkest thou that I made myself so completely thy slave as to avert mine eyes, at thy command, from the deeds which thou soughtest to achieve in secret? Oh! no—it was thou, poor mortal, who was the dupe! Thy miserable expedient of the Chamber of the Cradle was known to me from the first; and I laughed at that presumption which soared to outwit Satan! But there lives one man whose virtues I ever loathed, whose enterprising spirit I ever feared;—and that man is Otto Pianalla. I sought to make him mine—I endeavoured to cast my chains around him! When he was on the point of starvation, I appeared to him in human form, and gave him gold—requiring at the same time a service at his hands; for well did I know that his proud spirit would not accept the purse of charity. I hoped that so sudden a transition from bitterest poverty to comparative affluence

would undermine his integrity, and plunge him into the paths of pleasure. But it sometimes happens in the world that the gifts of Satan are used against himself, and that the temptations of hell only serve to strengthen the human mind in virtue. Such was the case with Otto Pianalla;—and the gold that I gave him was rendered, by a higher power which I dare not name, the element of his prosperity and happiness. Thus were the weapons with which I fought, turned, when they fell in virtuous hands, against myself!"

"And Otto has succeeded in saving my son from thine accursed grasp!" almost shrieked Faust, as he averted his head in dismay from the terrible countenance of the Demon.

"Yes—he has succeeded," answered the fiend, bitterly; "but not without a desperate struggle on my part to retain my hold on the youth whom you—his father—made over to me even ere he was born! I threw the virtuous Otto in the way of Lucreza Borgia—but in vain:—I sought to impede his journey to the summit of Mount Ararat—but in vain. Vainly also did I cast him into the power of Lucreza in the isle of Lissa—vainly did I make her my instrument to plunge him into a dungeon of so terrible a nature that if he would have ever yielded to my temptations, it was there—it was then! But vainly, I say, did I do all this: Otto has escaped me—and never, never more may my influence be turned against his happiness or his integrity!"

"And wherefore tell me all this?" asked Faust, scarcely knowing what he said, so appalling were the fears which oppressed him.

"To show thee, miserable wretch that thou art!" cried the fiend, in a dreadful tone—"to show thee that Heaven never deserts those who implicitly and earnestly put their faith in its power,—to show thee that there was even hope for such as thou, had thine heart been courageous enough to trust in Him whom I dare not name! Yes—let me embitter the last few moments of thy miserable life, by teaching thee that thou hast voluntarily made thyself mine! For hadst thou listened to the advice of Otto Pianalla—hadst thou, even yester-night, followed his counsel, and sought the altar,—thinkest thou I should have dared to drag thee thence? No—no; powerful as I am, there is ONE before whose shrine even Satan quails and trembles!"

"What is it that you tell me?" exclaimed Faust, in a tone of the wildest agony: "was there indeed hope for me? Oh! wretch—wretch that I am!"

"Yes—there was hope; for the mercy of Him is infinite," returned the Demon, greedily gloating on the agonies of the miserable mortal whom he had so successfully ensnared in his toils. "But now it is too late; and hell yawns to receive you. For never will it have yet opened its hideous jaws to swallow up a more fearful sinner! To suit thy wayward purposes—to minister to thy passions, what misery has been accomplished—what myriads of lives have been sacrificed. When from the heights of the Brocken I raised, at thy command, the fearful tempest which desolated the provinces of the Elbe, thousands and thousands of poor innocent beings were ruined by that dread visitation. Their crops were destroyed—their flocks and herds swept away—their cottages levelled with the ground. Again it was thy wish to visit hell at a time when all its fires were raging with the utmost fury; and, in obedience to thy wish, the horrors of my kingdom were so enhanced that the flames poured forth from the bowels of this very mountain. That erup-

tion was caused by thee! Again, how many millions been cut off by that plague which, in obedience to will, was evoked from the east, to which its ravages would have been confined but for thy command! And, lastly, art thou not the murderer of thine own wife—the woman who loved thee so tenderly and so well?"

"Spare me—spare me!" cried Faust, clasping his hands together. "Oh! that I had perished—or she had died—ere that fatal day when—"

"And she would have died long years ago," interrupted the Demon; "yes, died by the hand of your paramour, Ida, had not Otto Pianalla saved her by an antidote against the poison prepared for her!"

"What, hast thou ever saved a human life!" exclaimed Faust: "Oh! then, thou art not without mercy!"

"Never—never, since my Fall, did I know what mercy was," answered the Demon, with fearful emphasis. "Think not that I saved your wife then through such a motive! No:—but I foresaw, limited as my powers of reading the future are, that your career was of such a nature as to involve the death of her who loved thee best and most sincerely! For that I saved Theresa,—saved her only that she might die through thy misdeeds, and thus complete the black catalogue of thy crimes!"

"O fiend, ten thousand times accursed," shrieked Faust, wildly; "too well have all your horrible designs succeeded!"

"Ah! wretched mortal," exclaimed the Demon, with sovereign scorn, "how mean—how miserable—how petty have all thy machinations proved in comparison with mine! And how inconsistent has thy conduct been! When thou wast snatched from the dungeon of Wittenberg twenty-four years ago, thou wouldst not suffer me to kill thine enemy the Chief Judge;—but thou didst order me to appear in a frightful shape before him, and enjoin him never more to molest thee! Yet didst thou prove the means of putting his son to death—his son, who never injured thee! And afterwards, thou—who didst scruple at the first to slay the unjust magistrate that would have sent thee to a scaffold,—thou was the cause of bringing whirlwind, volcanic eruption, and plague upon innocent millions! Oh! I am disgusted with thine inconsistencies;—and now shall I make thee mine!"

"Spare me—in mercy spare me awhile!" cried Faust, falling upon his knees before the Demon. "Oh! drag me not away from that world on which the sun now shines so brightly! If I am thine for all eternity, then grant me a few more years of life upon this earth! What is the boon I ask? It is the same as if the whole ocean did belong to thee, and thou wast to lose a single drop of those boundless waters! Oh! grant me a year—a month—a week—another day—another hour!"

"The measure of thy guilt is full," exclaimed the fiend; "for now thou dost kneel to Satan!"

"Mercy—oh! mercy!" cried Faust, as the Demon advanced to seize him: "an hour—a few minutes—and I am thine!"

"Thou art mine now!" thundered the fiend, casting his arms around the shrieking victim.

At the same moment a glow of lurid flame shot upwards from the depths of the crater;—the scorching lava boiled over the sides of the mountain;—Vesuvius roared with the earthquake which shook it to its very base;—and the air was rent by the screams of the wretched being whom Satan hurled headlong into the bosom of the volcano.

THE END.

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# WAGNER, THE WEHR-WOLF.

## PROLOGUE.

It was the month of January, 1516.

The night was dark and tempestuous;—the thunder growled around;—the lightning flashed at short intervals;—and the wind swept furiously along, in sudden and fitful gusts.

The streams of the great Black Forest of Germany bubbled in playful melody no more, but rushed on with deafening din, mingling their torrent-roar with the wild creaking of the huge oaks, the rustling of the fir, the howling of the affrighted wolves, and the hollow voices of the storm.

The dense black clouds were driven restlessly athwart the sky; and when the vivid lightning gleamed forth with rapid and eccentric glare, it seemed as if the dark jaws of some hideous monster, floating high above, opened to vomit flame.

And as the abrupt but furious gusts of wind swept through the forest they raised strange echoes—as if the impervious mazes of that mighty wood were the abode of hideous fiends and evil spirits, who responded in shrieks, moans, and lamentations, to the fearful din of the tempest.

It was indeed an appalling sight!

An old—old man sat in his little cottage on the verge of the Black Forest.

He had numbered ninety years: his head was completely bald—his mouth was toothless—his long beard was white as snow—and his limbs were feeble and trembling.

He was alone in the world: his wife—his children—his grand-children—all his relations, in fine, *save one*—had preceded him on that long last voyage from which no traveller returns.

And that one was a grand-daughter—a beautiful girl of sixteen, who had hitherto been his solace and his comfort, but who had suddenly disappeared—he knew not how—a few days previously to the time when we discover him seated thus lonely in his poor cottage.

But perhaps she also was dead? An accident might have snatched her away from him, and sent her spirit to join those of her father and mother, her sisters, and her brothers, whom a terrible pestilence—the *Black Death*—hurried to the tomb a few years before?

No: the old man could not believe that his darling grand-daughter was no more—for he had sought her throughout the neighbouring district of the Black Forest, and not a trace of her was to be seen. Had she fallen down a precipice, or perished by the ruthless murderer's hand, he would have discovered her mangled corpse: had she become the prey of the ravenous wolves, certain signs of her fate would have doubtless somewhere appeared.

The sad—the chilling conviction therefore went to the old man's heart, that the only being left to solace him on earth, had deserted him; and his spirit was bowed down in despair.

Who now would prepare his food, while he tended his little flock? who was there to collect the dry branches in the forest, for the winter's fuel, while the aged shepherd watched a few sheep that he possessed? who would now spin him warm clothing to protect his weak and trembling limbs?

"Oh! Agnes," he murmured, in a tone indicative of a breaking heart, "how couldst thou have thus abandoned me? Didst thou quit the old man to follow some youthful lover, who will buoy thee up with bright hopes, and then deceive thee? O Agnes—my darling! hast thou left me to perish without a soul to close my eyes?"

It was painful how that aged shepherd wept.

Suddenly a loud knock at the door of the cottage aroused him from his painful reverie; and he hastened, as fast as his trembling limbs would permit him, to answer the summons.

He opened the door; and a tall man, apparently about forty years of age, entered the humble dwelling. His light hair would have been magnificent indeed, were it not sorely neglected; his blue eyes were naturally fine and intelligent, but fearful now to meet, so wild and wandering were their glances—his form was tall and admirably symmetrical, but prematurely bowed by the weight of sorrow;—and his attire was of costly material, but indicative of inattention even more than it was travel-soiled.

The old man closed the door, and courteously drew a stool near the fire for the stranger who had sought in his cottage a refuge against the fury of the storm.

He also placed food before him; but the stranger touched it not—horror and dismay appearing to have taken possession of his soul.

Suddenly the thunder, which had hitherto growled at a distance, burst above the humble abode; and the wind swept by with so violent a gust, that it shook the little tenement to its foundation, and filled the neighbouring forest with strange, unearthly noises.

Then the countenance of the stranger expressed such ineffable horror, amounting to a fearful agony, that the old man was alarmed, and stretched out his hand to grasp a crucifix that hung over the chimney-piece: but his mysterious guest made a forbidding sign of so much earnestness, mingled with such proud authority, that the aged shepherd sank back into his seat without touching the sacred symbol.

The roar of the thunder past—the shrieking, whistling, gushing wind became temporarily lulled into low moans and subdued lamentations amidst the mazes of the Black Forest;—and the stranger grew more composed.

"Dost thou tremble at the storm?" inquired the old man.

"I am unhappy," was the evasive and somewhat impatient reply. "Seek not to know more of me—beware how you question me. But you, old man, are you happy? The traces of care seem to mingle with the wrinkles of age upon your brow."

The shepherd narrated, in brief and touching terms, the unaccountable disappearance of his much-loved grand-daughter Agnes.

The stranger listened abstractedly at first; but afterwards he appeared to reflect profoundly for several minutes.

"Your lot is a wretched one, old man," he said, at length "if you live a few years longer, that period must be passed in solitude and cheerlessness;—if you suddenly fall ill, you must die the lingering death of famine, without a soul to place a morsel of food, or the cooling cup to your lips;—and when you shall be no more, who will follow you to the grave? There are no



habitations nigh: the nearest village is half-a-day's journey distant;—and ere the peasants of that hamlet or some passing traveller might discover that the inmate of this hut had breathed his last, the wolves from the forest would have entered and mangled your corpse."

"Talk not thus!" cried the old man, with a visible shudder: then, darting a half-terrified, half-curious glance at his guest, he said, "But who are you that speak in this awful strain—this warning voice?"

Again the thunder rolled, with crashing sound above the cottage; and once more the wind swept by, laden, as it seemed, with the shrieks and groans of human beings in the agonies of death.

The stranger maintained a certain degree of composure only by means of a desperate effort; but he could not altogether subdue a wild flashing of the eyes and a ghastly change of the countenance—signs of a profoundly-felt terror.

"Again, I say, ask me not who I am!" he exclaimed, when the thunder and the gust had passed. "My soul recoils from the bare idea of pronouncing my own accursed name! But—unhappy as you see me—crushed, overwhelmed with deep affliction as you behold me—anxious, but unable, to repent for the past as I am, and filled with appalling dread for the future as I now proclaim myself to be—still is my power far, far beyond that limit which hems mortal energies within so small a sphere. Speak, old man—wouldst thou change thy condition? For to me—and to me alone of all human beings—belongs the means of giving thee new life—of bestowing upon thee the vigour of youth—of rendering that stooping frame upright and strong—of restoring fire to those glazing eyes, and beauty to that wrinkled, sunken, withered countenance, of endowing thee, in a word, with a fresh tenure of existence, and making that existence sweet by the aid of treasures so vast that no extravagance can dissipate them!"

A strong though indefinite dread assailed the old man as this astounding proffer was rapidly opened, in all its alluring details, to his mind;—and various images of terror presented themselves to his imagination;—but these feelings were almost immediately dominated by a wild and ardent hope, which became the more attractive and exciting in proportion as a rapid glance at his helpless, wretched, deserted condition led him to survey the contrast between what he then was, and what, if the stranger spoke truly, he might so soon become.

The stranger saw that he had made the desired impression;—and he continued thus:—

"Give but your assent, old man,—and not only will I render thee young, handsome, and wealthy; but I will endow thy mind with an intelligence to match that proud position. Thou shalt go forth into the world to enjoy all those pleasures—those delights—and those luxuries, the names of which are even now scarcely known to thee!"

"And what is the price of this glorious boon?" asked the old man, trembling with mingled joy and terror throughout every limb.

"There are two conditions," answered the stranger, in a low, mysterious tone. "The first is, that you become the companion of my wanderings for one year and a half from the present time—until the hour of sunset on the 30th of July, 1517—when we must part for ever,—you to go whithersoever your inclinations may guide you—and I—But of that, no matter!" he added, hastily, with a sudden motion, as if of deep mental agony, and with wildly flashing eyes.

The old man shrank back in dismay from his mysterious guest: the thunder rolled again—the rude gust swept fiercely by—the dark forest rustled awfully—and the stranger's torturing feelings were evidently prolonged by the voices of the storm.

A pause ensued; and the silence was at length broken by the old man, who said, in a hollow and tremulous tone, "To the first condition I would willingly accede. But the second?"

"That you prey upon the human race, whom I hate—because of all the world I alone am so deeply, so terribly accursed!" was the ominously fearful yet only dimly significant reply.

The old man shook his head—scarcely comprehending the words of his guest, and yet daring not to ask to be more enlightened.

"Listen!" said the stranger, in a hasty, but impressive voice. "I require a companion—one who has no human ties, and who will minister to my caprices,—who will devote himself wholly and solely to watch me in my dark hours, and endeavour to recall me back to enjoyment and pleasure,—who, when he shall be acquainted with

my power, will devise new means in which to exercise it for the purpose of conjuring up those scenes of enchantment and delight that may for a season win me away from thought. Such a companion do I need for a period of one year and a half; and you are, of all men, the best suited to my design. But the Spirit whom I must invoke to effect the promised change in thee, and by whose aid you can be given back to youth and comeliness, will demand some fearful sacrifice at your hands. And the nature of that sacrifice—the nature of the condition to be imposed—I can well divine!"

"Name the sacrifice—name the condition!" cried the old man, eagerly. "I am so miserable—so spirit-broken—so totally without hope in this world, that I greedily long to enter upon that new existence which you promise me! Say, then—what is the condition?"

"That you prey upon the human race, whom I hate as well as I," answered the stranger.

"Again those awful words!" ejaculated the old man, casting trembling glances around him.

"Yes—again those words!" echoed the mysterious guest, looking with his fierce, burning eyes into the glazed orbs of the aged shepherd. "And now learn their import!" he continued, in a solemn tone. "Knowest thou not that there is a belief in many parts of our native land, that at particular seasons certain doomed men throw off the human shape, and take that of ravenous wolves?"

"Oh! yes—yes—I have indeed heard of those strange legends in which the Wehr-Wolf is represented in such appalling colours!" exclaimed the old man, a terrible suspicion crossing his mind. "Tis said that at sunset on the last day of every month the mortal to whom belongs the destiny of the Wehr-Wolf, must change his natural form for that of the savage animal; in which horrible shape he must remain until the moment when the morrow's sun dawns upon the earth."

"The legend that told thee this, spoke truly," said the stranger. "And now dost thou comprehend the condition which must be imposed upon thee?"

"I do—I do!" murmured the old man, with a fearful shudder. "But he who accepts that condition makes a compact with the Evil One, and thereby endangers his immortal soul!"

"Not so," was the reply. "There is naught involved in this condition which—But hesitate not," added the stranger, hastily: "I have not time to waste in bandying words. Consider all I offer you: in another hour you shall be another man!"

"I accept the boon—and on the conditions stipulated!" exclaimed the shepherd.

"Tis well, Wagner—"

"What! you know my name!" cried the old man. "And yet, meseems, I did not mention it to thee."

"Canst thou not already perceive that I am no common mortal?" demanded the stranger, bitterly. "And who I am—and whence I derive my power,—all, all shall be revealed to thee so soon as the bond is formed that must link us for eighteen months together! In the meantime, await me here!"

And the mysterious stranger quitted the cottage abruptly, and plunged into the depths of the Black Forest.

One hour elapsed ere he returned,—one mortal hour, during which Wagner sat bowed over his miserably sooty fire, dreaming of pleasure—youth—riches—and enjoyment;—converting, in imagination, the myriad sparks which shone upon the extinguishing embers into piles of gold,—and allowing his now unceasing fancy to change the one single room of the wretched hovel into a splendid saloon, surrounded by resplendent mirrors and costly hangings,—while the untasted fare spread for the stranger on the rude fire-table, became transformed, in his idea, into a magnificent banquet laid out on a board glittering with plate, lustrous with innumerable lamps, and surrounded by an atmosphere fragrant with the most exquisite perfumes?

The return of the stranger awoke the old man from this charming dream, during which he had never once thought of the conditions whereby he was to purchase the complete realization of the vision.

"Oh! what a glorious reverie you have dissipated!" exclaimed Wagner. "Fulfil but one tenth part of that delightful dream—"

"I will fulfil it all!" interrupted the stranger; then, producing a small phial from the bosom of his doublet, he said, "Drink!"

The old man seized the bottle, and greedily drained it to the dregs.

He immediately fell back upon the seat, in a state of complete lethargy.

But it lasted not for many minutes; and when he awoke again, he experienced new and extraordinary sensations. His limbs were vigorous—his form was upright as an arrow—his eyes, for many years dim and failing, seemed gifted with the sight of an eagle—his head was warm with a natural covering—not a wrinkle remained upon his brow nor on his cheeks—and, as he smiled with mingled wonderment and delight, the parting lips revealed a set of brilliant teeth. And it seemed, too, as if by one magic touch, the long-fading tree of his intellect had suddenly burst into full foliage; and every cell of his brain was instantaneously stored with an amount of knowledge, the accumulation of which stunned him for an instant, and in the next appeared as familiar to him as if he had never been without it.

"Oh! great and powerful being, whosoever thou art!" exclaimed Wagner, in the full melodious voice of a young man of twenty-one, "how can I manifest to thee my deep—my boundless gratitude for this boon which thou hast conferred upon me?"

"By thinking no more of thy lost grand-child Agnes, but by preparing to follow me whither I shall now lead thee," replied the stranger.

"Command me: I am ready to obey in all things," cried Wagner. "But one word ere we set forth—who art thou, wondrous man?"

"Henceforth I have no secrets from thee, Wagner," was the answer, while the stranger's eyes gleamed with unearthly lustre; then, bending forward, he whispered a few words in the other's ear.

Wagner started with a cold and fearful shudder as if at some appalling announcement; but he uttered not a word of reply—for his master beckoned him imperiously away from the humble cottage.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE DEATH-BED.—THE OATH.—THE LAST INJUNCTIONS.

OUR tale commences in the middle of the month of November, 1520, and at the hour of midnight.

In a magnificently-furnished chamber, belonging to one of the largest mansions of Florence, a nobleman lay at the point of death.

The light of the lamp suspended to the ceiling played upon the ghastly countenance of the dying man, the stern expression of whose features was not even mitigated by the fears and uncertainties attendant on the hour of dissolution.

He was about forty-eight years of age, and had evidently been wondrous handsome in his youth; for though the frightful pallor of death was already upon his cheeks, and the fire of his large black eyes was dimmed with the ravages of a long-endured disease, still the faultless outlines of the aquiline profile remained unimpaired.

The most superficial observer might have read the aristocratic pride of his soul in the haughty curl of his short upper lip,—the harshness of his domineering character in the lines that marked his forehead,—and the cruel sternness of his disposition in the expression of his entire countenance.

Without absolutely scowling as he lay on that bed of death, his features were characterized by an inexorable severity which seemed to denote the predominant influence of some intense passion—some evil sentiment deeply rooted in his mind.

Two persons leant over the couch to which death was so rapidly approaching.

One was a lady of about twenty-five: the other was a youth of nineteen.

The former was eminently beautiful: but her countenance was marked with much of that severity—that determination—and even of that sternness which characterized the dying nobleman. Indeed, a single glance was sufficient to show that they stood in the close relationship of father and daughter.

Her long, black, glossy hair now hung dishevelled over the shoulders that were left partially bare by the hastily negligence with which she had thrown on a loose wrapper:—and those shoulders were of the most dazzling whiteness.

The wrapper was confined by a broad band at the waist; and the slight drapery set off, rather than concealed, the rich contours of a form of matured but admirable symmetry.

Tall, graceful, and elegant, she united easy motion

with fine proportion; thus possessing the lightness of the Sylph and the luxuriant fulness of the Hebe.

Her countenance was alike expressive of intellectuality and strong passions. Her large black eyes were full of fire; and their glances seemed to penetrate the soul. Her nose, of the fine aquiline development,—her lips, narrow, but red and pouting, with the upper one short and slightly projecting over the lower, and her small, delicately rounded chin, indicated both decision and sensuality: but the insolent gaze of the libertine would have quailed beneath the look of sovereign hauteur which flashed from those brilliant eagle eyes.

In a word, she appeared to be a woman well adapted to command the admiration—receive the homage—excite the passions—and yet repel the insolence of the opposite sex.

But those appearances were to some degree deceitful: for never was homage offered to her—never was she courted nor flattered.

Ten years previously to the time of which we are writing—and when she was only fifteen—the death of her mother, under strange and mysterious circumstances, as it was generally reported, made such a terrible impression on her mind, that she hovered for months on the verge of dissolution; and when the physician who attended upon her communicated to her father the fact that her life was at length beyond danger, that assurance was followed by the sad and startling declaration, that she had for ever lost the sense of hearing and the power of speech.

No wonder, then, that homage was never paid nor adulation offered to Nisida—the deaf and dumb daughter of the proud Count of Riverola!

Those who were intimate with this family ere the occurrence of that sad event,—especially the physician, Dr. Duras, who had attended upon the mother in her last moments, and on the daughter during her illness,—declared that, up to the period when the malady assailed her, Nisida was a sweet, amiable, and retiring girl; but she had evidently been fearfully changed by the terrible affliction which that malady left behind. For if she could no longer express herself in words, her eyes darted lightning upon the unhappy menials who had the misfortune to incur her displeasure; and her lips would quiver with the violence of concentrated passions, at the most trifling neglect or error of which the female dependants immediately attached to her own person might happen to be guilty.

Towards her father she often manifested a strange ebullition of anger—bordering even on inveterate spite, when he offended her; and yet, singular though it were, the Count was devotedly attached to his daughter. He frequently declared that, afflicted as she was, he was proud of her; for he was wont to behold in her flashing eyes—her curling lip—and her haughty air, the reflection of his own proud—his own inexorable spirit.

The youth of nineteen to whom we have alluded, was Nisida's brother; and much as the father appeared to dote upon the daughter, was the son proportionately disliked by that stern and despotic man.

Perhaps this want of affection—or rather this complete aversion—on the part of the Count of Riverola towards the young Francisco, owed its origin to the total discrepancy of character existing between the father and son. Francisco was as amiable, generous, hearty, frank, and agreeable as his sire was austere, stern, reserved, and tyrannical. The youth was also unlike his father in personal appearance, his hair being of a rich brown, his eyes of a soft blue, and the general expression of his countenance indicating the fairest and most endearing qualities which can possibly characterize human nature.

We must, however, observe, before we pursue our narrative, that Nisida imitated not her father in her conduct towards Francisco;—for she loved him—she loved him with the most ardent affection—such an affection as a sister seldom manifests towards a brother. It was rather the attachment of a mother for her child; inasmuch as Nisida studied all his comforts—watched over him, as it were, with the tenderest solicitude—was happy when he was present—melancholy when he was absent,—and seemed to be constantly racking her imagination to devise new means to afford him pleasure.

To treat Francisco with the least neglect was to arouse the wrath of a Fury in the breast of Nisida; and every unkind look which the Count inflicted upon his son, was sure, if perceived by the daughter, to evoke the terrible lightnings of her brilliant eyes.

Such were the three persons whom we have thus minutely described to our readers.

The Count had been ill for some weeks at the time when this chapter opens; but on the night which marks that commencement, Dr. Duras had deemed it his duty to warn the nobleman that he had not many hours to live.

The dying man had accordingly desired that his children might be summoned; and when they entered the apartment, the physician and the priest were requested to withdraw.

Francisco now stood on one side of the bed, and Nisida on the other; while the Count collected his remaining strength to address his last injunctions to his son.

"Francisco," he said, in a cold tone, "I have little inclination to speak at any great length; but the words I am about to utter are solemnly important. I believe you entertain the most sincere and earnest faith in that symbol which now lies beneath your hand."

"This crucifix!" ejaculated the young man; "Oh! yes, my dear father—it is the emblem of that faith which teaches us how to live and die."

"Then take it up—press it to your lips—and swear to obey the instructions which I am about to give you," said the Count.

Francisco did as he was desired; and, although tears were streaming from his eyes, he exclaimed, in an emphatic manner, "I swear most solemnly to fulfil your commands, my dear father—so confident am I that you will enjoin nothing that involves aught dishonourable!"

"Spare your qualifications," cried the Count, sternly: "and swear without reserve—or expect my dying curse, rather than my blessing."

"Ah! my dear father," ejaculated the youth, with intense anguish of soul, "talk not of so dreadful a thing as bequeathing me your dying curse! I swear to fulfil your injunctions—without reserve!"

And he kissed the holy symbol.

"You act wisely," said the Count, fixing his glazing eyes upon the handsome countenance of the young man, who now awaited in breathless suspense, a communication thus solemnly prefaced. "This key," continued the nobleman, taking one from beneath his pillow as he spoke, "belongs to the door in yonder corner of the apartment."

"That door which is never opened!" exclaimed Francisco, casting an anxious glance in the direction indicated.

"Who told you that the door was never opened?" demanded the Count, sternly.

"I have heard the servants remark—" began the youth, in a timid but still frank and candid manner.

"Then, when I am no more, see that you put an end to such impertinent gossiping; see that the nobleman, impatiently; and you will be the better convinced of the propriety of thus acting as soon as you have learnt the nature of my injunctions. That door," he continued, "communicates with a small closet, which is accessible by no other means. Now my wish—my command is this:—Upon the day of your marriage, whenever such an event may occur—and I suppose you do not intend to remain unwedded all your life—I enjoin you to open the door of that closet. You must be accompanied by your bride—and by no other living soul. I also desire that this may be done with the least possible delay after the matrimonial ceremony,—the very day—the very morning—within the very hour after you quit the church. That closet contains the means of elucidating a mystery profoundly connected with me—with you—with the family,—a mystery, the development of which may prove of incalculable service alike to yourself and to her who may share your title and your wealth. But should you never marry, then must the closet remain unvisited by you; nor need you trouble yourself concerning the eventual discovery of the secret which it contains, by any persons into whose hands the mansion may fall at your death. It is also my wish that your sister should remain in complete ignorance of the instructions I am now giving you. Alas! poor girl—she cannot hear the words which fall from my lips: neither shall you communicate their import to her by writing, nor by the language of the fingers. And remember that while I bestow upon you my blessing—my dying blessing,—may that blessing become a withering curse—the curse of hell upon you—if in any way you violate one tittle of the injunctions which I have now given you."

"My dearest father," replied the weeping youth, who had listened with the most profound attention to these extraordinary commands; "I would not for worlds act contrary to your wishes. Singular as they appear to me, they shall be fulfilled to the very letter."

He received from his father's hands the mysterious key, which he secured about his person.

"You will find," resumed the Count, after a brief pause, "that I have left the whole of my property to you. At the same time my will specifies certain conditions relative to your sister Nisida, for whom I have made due provision only in the case—which is, alas! almost in defiance of every hope!—of her recovery from that dreadful affliction which renders her so completely dependent upon your kindness."

"Dearest father, you know how sincerely I am attached to my sister—how devoted she is to me—"

"Enough—enough!" cried the Count: and, overcome by the efforts he had made to deliver his last injunctions, he fell back insensible on his pillow.

Nisida, who had retained her face buried in her hands during the whole time occupied in the above conversation, happened to look up at that moment; and perceiving the condition of her father, she made a hasty sign to Francisco to summon the physician and the priest from the room to which they had retired.

This commission was speedily executed; and in a few minutes the physician and the priest were once more by the side of the dying noble.

But the instant that Dr. Duras—who was a venerable looking man of about sixty years of age—approached the bed, he darted, unseen by Francisco, a glance of earnest inquiry towards Nisida, who responded by one of profound meaning, shaking her head gently, but in a manner expressive of deep melancholy, at the same time.

The physician appeared to be astonished at the negative thus conveyed by the beautiful mute; and he even manifested a sign of angry impatience.

But Nisida threw upon him a look of so imploring a nature, that his temporary vexation yielded to a feeling of immense commiseration for that afflicted creature; and he gave her to understand by another rapid glance, that her prayer was accorded.

This interchange of signs of such deep mystery scarcely occupied a moment, and was altogether unobserved by Francisco.

Doctor Duras proceeded to administer restoratives to the dying nobleman—but in vain!

The Count had fallen into a lethargic stupor, which lasted until four in the morning, when his spirit passed gently away.

The moment Francisco and Nisida became aware that they were orphans, they threw themselves into each other's arms, and renewed by that tender embrace the tacit compact of sincere affection which had ever existed between them.

Francisco's tears flowed freely: but Nisida did not weep!

A strange—an almost portentous light shone in her brilliant black eyes; and though that wild gleaming denoted powerful emotion, yet it shed no lustre upon the unfathomable depths of her soul—afforded no clue to the real nature of those agitated feelings.

Suddenly withdrawing himself from his sister's arms, Francisco conveyed to her by the language of the fingers the following tender sentiment:—"You have lost a father, beloved Nisida, but you have a devoted and affectionate brother left to you."

And Nisida replied, through the same medium, "Your happiness, dearest brother, has ever been my only study—and shall continue so."

The physician and Father Marco, the priest, now advanced, and taking the brother and sister by the hands, led them from the chamber of death.

"Kind friends," said Francisco, now Count of Riverola, "I understand you. You would withdraw my sister from a scene too mournful to contemplate. Alas! it is hard to lose a father; but especially so at my age, inexperienced as I am in the ways of the world!"

"The world is indeed made up of thorny paths and devious ways, my dear young friend," returned the physician; "but a stout heart and integrity of purpose will ever be found faithful guides. The more exalted and the wealthier the individual, the greater the temptations he will have to encounter. Reflect upon this, Francisco: it is advice which I, as an old—indeed, the oldest friend of your family—take the liberty to offer."

With these words, the venerable physician wrung the hands of the brother and sister, and hurried from the house, followed by the priest.

The orphans embraced each other, and retired to their respective apartments.

## CHAPTER II.

## NISIDA.—THE MYSTERIOUS CLOSET.

THE room to which Nisida withdrew, between four and five o'clock on that mournful winter's morning, was one of a suite entirely appropriated to her own use.

This suite consisted of three apartments, communicating with each other, and all furnished in the elegant and tasteful manner of that age.

The innermost of the three rooms was used by Nisida as her bed-chamber; and when she now entered it, a young girl, beautiful as an angel, but dressed in the

—her proud forehead supported on her delicate hand—her lips apart, and revealing the pearly teeth—her lids with their long black fringes half-closed over the brilliant eyes—and her fine form cast in voluptuous abandonment upon the soft cushions of the chair,—she indeed seemed a magnificent creature!

But when, suddenly awaking from that profound meditation, she started from her seat with flashing eyes,—heaving bosom—and an expression of countenance denoting a fixed determination to accomplish some deed from which her better feelings vainly bade her to abstain; when she drew her tall—her even majestic form

“POINTED TO THE PAPER IN A SIGNIFICANT MANNER.” (See p. 11.)

attire of a dependant, instantly rose from a seat near the fire that blazed on the hearth, and cast a respectful but inquiring glance towards her mistress.

Nisida gave her to understand, by a sign, that all was over.

The girl started—as if surprised that her lady indicated so little grief; but the latter motioned her with an impatient gesture to leave the room.

When Flora—such was the name of the dependant—had retired, Nisida threw herself into a large arm-chair near the fire, and immediately became buried in a deep reverie.

With her splendid hair flowing upon her white shoulders

up to its full height, the drapery shadowing forth every contour of undulating bust and exquisitely modelled limb,—while her haughty lip curled in contempt of any consideration save her own indomitable will,—she appeared rather a heroine capable of leading an Amazonian army, than a woman to whom the sighing swain might venture to offer up the incense of love.

There was something awful in the aspect of this mysterious being,—something ineffably grand and imposing in her demeanour,—as she thus suddenly rose from her almost recumbent posture, and burst into the attitude of a resolute and energetic woman.

Drawing the wrapper around her form, she lighted a

lamp, and was about to quit the chamber, when her eyes suddenly encountered the mild and benignant glance which the portrait of a lady appeared to cast upon her.

This portrait, which hung against the wall precisely opposite to the bed, represented a woman about thirty years of age,—a woman of beauty much in the same style as that of Nisida, but not marred by anything approaching to a sternness of expression. On the contrary, if an angel had looked through those mild black eyes, their glances could not have been endowed with a holier kindness; the smiles of good spirits could not be more plaintively sweet than those which the artist had made to play upon the lips of that portrait.

Yet in spite of this discrepancy between the expression of Nisida's countenance and that of the lady who had formed the subject of the picture, it was not difficult to perceive a certain physical likeness between the two; nor will the reader be surprised when we state that Nisida was now gazing on the portrait of her deceased mother!

And that gaze—oh! how intent—how earnest—how enthusiastic it was! It manifested something more than love—something more impassioned and ardent than the affection which a daughter might exhibit towards even a living mother: it showed a complete devotion—an adoration—a worship!

Long and fixedly did Nisida gaze upon that portrait: till suddenly from her eyes, which shot such burning glances, gushed a torrent of tears.

Then probably fearful lest this weakness on her part might impair the resolution necessary to execute the purpose which she had in view—Nisida dashed away the tears from her long lashes, and hastily quitted the room.

Having traversed the two other apartments of her own suite, she cast a searching glance along the passage which she now entered; and, satisfied that none of the domestics were about,—for it was not yet six o'clock on that winter's morning,—she hastened to the end of the corridor.

The lamp flared with the speed at which she walked; and its uncertain light enhanced the pallor that now covered her countenance.

At the bottom of the passage she cautiously opened the door, and entered the room with which it communicated.

This was the sleeping apartment of her brother. A single glance convinced her that he was wrapt in the arms of slumber.

He slept soundly too—for he was wearied with the vigil which he had passed by the death-bed of his father—worn out also by the thousand conflicting and unsatisfactory conjectures that the last instructions of his parent had naturally excited in his mind.

He had not, however, been asleep a quarter of an hour when Nisida stole, in the manner described, into his chamber.

A smile of mingled joy and triumph animated her countenance, and a carnation tinge flushed her cheeks, when she found he was fast locked in the embrace of slumber.

Without a moment's hesitation, she examined his doublet, and clutched the key that his father had given to him scarcely six hours before.

Then, light as the fawn, she left the room.

Having retraced her steps half-way up the passage, she paused at the door of the chamber in which the corpse of her father lay.

For an instant—a single instant she seemed to revolt from the prosecution of her design: then, with a stern contraction of the brows, and an imperious curl of the lip—as if she said within herself "*Fool that I am to hesitate!*"—she entered the room.

Without fear—without compunction, she approached the bed. The body was laid out: stretched in its winding-sheet, stiff and stark did it seem to repose on the mattress—the countenance rendered more ghastly than even death could make it, by the white band which tied up the under-jaw.

The nurses who had thus disposed the corpse, had retired to snatch a few hours of rest; and there was consequently no spy upon Nisida's actions.

With a fearless step she advanced towards the closet—the mysterious closet relative to which such strange injunctions had been given!

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MANUSCRIPT.—FLORA FRANCATELLI.

NISIDA's hand trembled not as she placed the key in the lock: but when it turned, and she knew that in another instant she might open that door if she chose, she com-

pressed her lips firmly together—she called all her courage to her aid,—for she seemed to imagine that it was necessary to prepare herself to behold something frightfully appalling.

And now again her cheeks were deadly pale; but the light that burned in her eyes was brilliant in the extreme.

White as was her countenance, her large black orbs appeared to shine—to glow—to burn, as if with a violent fever.

Advancing the lamp with her left hand, she half-opened the door of the closet with her right.

Then she plunged her glances with rapidity into the recess.

But, holy God! what a start that courageous, bold and energetic woman gave,—a start as if the cold hand of a corpse had been suddenly thrust forth to grasp her.

And, oh! what horror convulsed her countenance—while her lips were compressed as tightly as if they were an iron vice!

Rapid and instantly recoiling as that glance was, it had nevertheless revealed to her an object of interest as well as of horror; for, with eyes now averted, she seized something within the closet, and thrust it into her bosom.

Then, hastily closing the door, she retraced her way to her brother's chamber.

He still slept soundly: Nisida returned the key to the pocket whence she had taken it, and hurried back to her own room, from which she had scarcely been absent five minutes.

And did she now seek her couch? did she repair to rest?

No!—that energetic woman experienced not weariness—yielded not to lassitude.

Carefully bolting the door of her innermost chamber, she seated herself again in the arm-chair, and drew from her bosom the object which she had taken from the mysterious closet.

It was a manuscript, consisting of several small slips of paper, somewhat closely written upon.

The writing was doubtless familiar to her: for she passed not to consider its nature, but greedily addressed herself to the study of the meaning which it conveyed.

And of terrible import seemed that manuscript to be: for while Nisida read, her countenance underwent many and awful changes: and her bosom heaved convulsively at one instant, while at another it remained motionless, as if respiration were suspended.

At length the perusal was completed; and grinding her teeth with demoniac rage, she threw the manuscript upon the floor. But at the same moment her eyes, which she cast wildly about her, caught the mild and benign countenance of her mother's portrait; and, as oil stills the fury of the boiling billows, did the influence of that picture calm in an instant the tremendous emotions of Nisida's soul.

Tears burst from her eyes; and she suddenly relapsed from the incarnate fiend into the subdued woman.

Then stooping down, she picked up the papers that lay scattered on the floor; but as she did so she averted her looks, with loathing and disgust, as much as possible from the pages that her hands collected almost at random.

And now another idea struck her—an idea the propriety of which evidently warred against her inclination. She was not a woman of mere impulses—although she often acted speedily after a thought had entered her brain. But she was wondrously quick at weighing all her reasons for or against the suggestions of her imagination; and thus, to any one who was not acquainted with her character, she might frequently appear to obey the first dictates of her impetuous passions.

Scarcely three minutes after the new idea had struck her, her resolution was fixed.

Once more concealing the papers in her bosom, she repaired with the lamp to her brother's room—purloined the key a second time—hastened to the chamber of death—opened the closet again—and again sustained the shock of a single glance at its horrors, as she returned the manuscript to the place whence she had originally taken it.

Then, having once more retraced her way to Francisco's chamber, she restored the key to the folds of his doublet—for he continued to sleep soundly; and Nisida succeeded in regaining her own apartments just in time to avoid the observation of the domestics, who were now beginning to move about.

Nisida sought her couch, and slept until nearly ten



o'clock, when she awoke with a start—doubtless caused by some unpleasant dream.

Having ascertained the hour by reference to a water-clock, or clepsidra, which stood on the marble pedestal near the head of the bed, she rose—unlocked the door of her apartment—rang a silver bell—and then returned to her bed.

In a few moments Flora, who had been waiting in the adjoining room, entered the chamber.

Nisida, on regaining her couch had turned her face towards the wall, and was, therefore, unable to perceive anything that took place in the apartment.

The mere mention of such a circumstance would be trivial in the extreme, were it not necessary to record it in consequence of an event which now occurred.

For, as Flora advanced into the room, her eyes fell on a written paper that lay immediately beneath the arm-chair; and conceiving, from its appearance, that it had not been thrown down on purpose, as it was in no wise crushed nor torn, she mechanically picked it up and placed it on the table.

She proceeded to arrange the toilet-table of her mistress, preparatory to that lady's rising; and, while she is thus employed, we will endeavour to make our readers a little better acquainted with her than they can possibly yet be.

Flora Francatelli was the orphan daughter of parents who had suddenly been reduced from a state of affluence to a condition of extreme poverty. Signor Francatelli could not survive this blow: he died of a broken heart;—and his wife shortly afterwards followed him to the tomb—also the victim of grief. They left two children behind them: Flora, who was then an infant, and a little boy named Alessandro, who was five years old. The orphans were entirely dependent upon the kindness of a maiden aunt—their departed father's sister. This relative, whose name was, of course, also Francatelli, performed a mother's part towards the children; and deprived herself not only of comforts, but at times even of necessities in order that they should not want. Father Marco, a priest belonging to one of the numerous monasteries of Florence, and who was a worthy man, took compassion upon this little family; and not only devoted his attention to teach the orphans to read and write—great accomplishments amongst the middle classes in those days—but also procured from a fund at the disposal of his abbot, certain pecuniary assistance for the aunt.

The care which this good relative took of the orphans, and the kindness of Father Marco, were well rewarded by the veneration and attachment which Alessandro and Flora manifested towards them. When Alessandro had numbered eighteen summers, he was fortunate enough to procure, through the interest of Father Marco, the situation of secretary to a Florentine noble who was charged with a diplomatic mission to the Ottoman Porte; and the young man proceeded to Leghorn, whence he embarked for Constantinople, attended by the prayers, blessings, hopes of the aunt and sister, and of the good priest, whom he left behind.

Two years after his departure, Father Marco obtained for Flora a situation about the person of the Lady Nisida; for the monk was confessor to the family of Riverola, and his influence was sufficient to secure that place for the young maiden.

We have already said that Flora was sweetly beautiful. Her large blue eyes were fringed with dark lashes, which gave them an expression of the most melting softness: her dark brown hair, arranged in modest bands, seemed of even a deeper hue when contrasted with the brilliant and transparent clearness of her complexion; and though her forehead was white and polished as alabaster, yet the rose-tint of health was upon her cheeks, and her lips had the rich redness of coral. Her nose was perfectly straight; her teeth were white and even; and the graceful arching of her swan-like neck imparted something of nobility to her tall, sylph-like, and exquisitely-proportioned figure.

Rearing and bashful in her manners, every look which fell from her eyes—every smile which wreathed her lips, denoted the chaste purity of her soul. With all her readiness to oblige—with all her anxiety to do her duty as she ought, she frequently incurred the anger of the irascible Nisida: but Flora supported those manifestations of wrath with the sweetest resignation, because the excellence of her disposition taught her to make every allowance for one so afflicted as her mistress.

Such was the young maiden whom the nature of the present tale compels us thus particularly to introduce to our readers.

Having carefully arranged the boudoir, so that its strict neatness might be welcome to her mistress when that lady chose to rise from her couch, Flora seated herself near the table, and gave way to her reflections.

She thought of her aunt, who inhabited a neat little cottage on the banks of the Arno, and whom she was usually permitted to visit every Sabbath afternoon: she thought of her absent brother, who was still in the service of the Florentine Envoy to the Ottoman Porte, where that diplomatist was detained by the tardiness that marked the negotiations with which he was charged;—and then she thought—thought, too, with an involuntary sigh—of Francisco, Count of Riverola.

She perceived that she had sighed—and without knowing precisely wherefore, she was angry with herself.

Anxious to turn the channel of her meditations in another direction, she rose from her seat to examine the clepsidra. That movement caused her eyes to fall upon the paper which she had picked up a quarter of an hour previously.

In spite of herself, the image of Francisco was still uppermost in her thoughts; and in the contemplative vein thus encouraged, her eyes lingered, unwittingly—and through no base motive of curiosity—upon the writing which the paper contained.

Thus she actually found herself reading the first four lines of the writing, before she recollected what she was doing.

The act was a purely mechanical one, which not the most rigid moralist could blame.

And had the contents of the paper been of no interest, she might even have continued to read more in that same abstracted mood;—but those four first lines were of a nature which sent a thrilling sensation of horror through her entire frame; the feeling terminating with an icy coldness at the heart.

She shuddered without starting—shuddered as she stood;—and not even a murmur escaped her lips.

The intenseness of that sudden pang of horror deprived her alike of speech and motion during the instant that it lasted.

And those lines, which produced so strange an impression upon the young maiden, ran thus:—

*“merciless scalpel hacked and hewed away at the still almost palpitating flesh of the murdered man, in whose breast the dagger remained deeply buried,—a ferocious joy—a savage hyena-like triumph—”*

Flora read no more: she could not even if she had wished.

For a minute she remained rooted to the spot: then she threw herself into the chair, bewildered and dismayed at the terrible words which had met her eyes.

She thought that the handwriting was not unknown to her; but she could not recollect whose it was. One fact was, however, certain—it was not the writing of her mistress.

She was still musing upon the horrible and mysterious contents of the paper, when Nisida rose from her couch.

Acknowledging with a slight nod of the head the respectful salutation of her attendant, she hastily slipped on a loose wrapper, and seated herself in the arm-chair which Flora had just abandoned.

The young girl then proceeded to comb out the long raven hair of her mistress. But this occupation was most rudely interrupted; for Nisida's eyes suddenly fell upon the manuscript page on the table; and then she started up in a paroxysm of mingled rage and alarm.

Having assured herself by a second glance that it was indeed a portion of the writings which had produced so strange an effect upon her a few hours previously, she turned abruptly towards Flora: and imperiously confronting the young maiden, pointed to the paper in a significant manner.

Flora immediately indicated by a sign that she had found it on the floor, beneath the arm-chair.

“And you have read it!” was the accusation which, with wonderful rapidity, Nisida conveyed by means of her fingers—fixing her piercing, penetrating eyes on Flora's countenance at the same time.

The young maiden scorned the idea of a falsehood; and, although she perceived that her reply would prove far from agreeable to her mistress, she unhesitatingly admitted, by the language of the hands, “I read the four first lines, and no more.”

A crimson glow instantly suffused the face, neck, shoulders, and bosom of Nisida; but, instantly compressing her lips—as was her wont when under the in-

fluence of her boiling passions—she turned her flashing eyes once more upon the paper, to ascertain which leaf of the manuscript it was.

That rapid glance revealed to her the import—the dread, but profoundly mysterious import—of the first four lines on that page; and again darting her soul-searching looks upon the trembling Flora, she demanded, by the rapid play of her delicate, taper fingers, “Will you swear that you read no more?”

“As I hope for salvation!” was the symbolic answer.

The penetrating, imperious glance of Nisida dwelt long upon the maiden’s countenance; but no sinister expression—no suspicious change on that fair and candid face contradicted the assertion which she had made.

“I believe you: but beware how you breathe to a living soul a word of what you did read!”

Such was the injunction which Nisida now conveyed by her usual means of communication; and Flora signified implicit obedience.

Nisida then secured the page of writing in her jewel-casket; and the details of the toilette were resumed.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE FUNERAL.—THE INTERRUPTION OF THE CEREMONY.

EIGHT days after the death of the Count of Riverola, the funeral took place.

The obsequies were celebrated at night, with all the pomp observed amongst noble families on such occasions. The church in which the corpse was buried, was hung with black cloth; and even the innumerable wax tapers which burnt upon the altar and around the coffin, failed to diminish the lugubrious aspect of the scene.

At the head of the bier stood the youthful heir of Riverola; his pale countenance of even feminine beauty contrasting strangely with the mourning garments which he wore, and his eyes bent upon the dark chasm that formed the family-vault into which the remains of his sire were about to be lowered.

Around the coffin stood Dr. Duras, and other male friends of the deceased: for the females of the family were not permitted, by the custom of the age and the religion, to be present on occasions of this kind.

It was eleven o’clock at night; and the weather without was stormy and tempestuous.

The wind moaned through the long aisles, raising strange and ominous echoes, and making the vast folds of sable drapery wave slowly backwards and forwards, as if agitated by unseen hands. A few spectators, standing in the background, appeared like grim figures on a black tapestry; and the gleam of the wax tapers, oscillating on their countenances, made them seem deathlike and ghastly.

From time to time the shrill wail of the shrieking owl, and the flapping of its wings against the diamond-paned windows of the church, added to the awful gloom of this funeral scene.

And now suddenly arose the chant of the priests—the parting hymn for the dead!

Francisco wept: for though his father had never manifested towards him an affection of the slightest endearing nature, yet the disposition of the young Count was excellent: and, when he gazed upon the coffin, he remembered not the coldness with which its inmate in his lifetime had treated him—he thought only of a parent whom he had lost, and whose remains were there!

And truly on the brink of the tomb no animosity should ever find a resting-place in the human heart. Though elsewhere men yield to the influence of their passions and their feelings, in pursuing each his separate interests,—though, in the great world, we push and jostle each other, as if the earth was not large enough to allow us to follow our separate ways,—yet when we meet around the grave to consign a fellow-creature to his last resting place, let peace and holy forgiveness occupy our souls. There let the clash of interest and the war of jealousies be forgotten; and let us endeavour to persuade ourselves, that, as all the conflicting pursuits of life must terminate at this point at last, so should our feelings converge to the one focus of amenity and Christian love. And, after all, how many, who have considered themselves to be antagonists, must, during a moment of solemn reflection, become convinced that when toiling in the great workshop of the world, they have been engaged, in unconscious fraternity, in building up the same fabric!

The priests were in the midst of their solemn chant—a deathlike silence and complete immovability prevailed amongst the mourners and the spectators—and the wind was moaning beneath the vaulted roofs, awaking those strange and tomb-like sounds which are only heard in large churches—when light but rushing footsteps were heard on the marble pavement; and in another minute a female, not clothed in a mourning garb, but splendidly attired as for a festival, precipitated herself towards the bier.

There her strength suddenly seemed to be exhausted; and, with a piercing scream, she sank senseless on the cold stones.

The chant of the priests was immediately stilled, and Francisco, hurrying forward, raised the female in his arms, while Dr. Duras asked for water to sprinkle on her countenance.

Over her head the stranger wore a white veil of rich material, which was fastened above her brow by a single diamond of unusual size and of brilliant lustre. When the veil was drawn aside, shining auburn tresses were seen depending in wanton luxuriance over shoulders of alabaster whiteness: a beautiful but deadly pale countenance was revealed; and a splendid purple velvet dress delineated the soft and flowing outlines of a form modelled to the most perfect symmetry.

She seemed to be about twenty years of age,—in the full splendour of loveliness, and endowed with charms which presented to the gaze of those around a very incarnation of the ideal beauty which forms the theme of raptured poets.

And now, as the vacillating and uncertain light of the wax candles beamed upon her, as she lay senseless in the arms of the Count of Riverola, her pale, placid face appeared that of a classic marble statue; but nothing could surpass the splendid effects which the funeral tapers produced on the rich redundancy of her hair, which seemed dark where the shadow rested on it, but glittering as with a bright glory where the lustre played on its shining masses.

In spite of the solemnity of the place and the occasion, the mourners were struck by the dazzling beauty of that young female, who had thus appeared so strangely amongst them: but respect still retained at a distance those persons who were merely present from curiosity to witness the obsequies of one of the proudest nobles of Florence.

At length the lady opened her large hazel eyes, and glanced wildly around, a quick spasm passing like an electric shock over her frame at the same instant: for the funeral scene burst upon her view, and reminded her where she was, and why she was there.

Recovering herself almost as rapidly as she had succumbed beneath physical and mental exhaustion, she started from Francisco’s arms; and, turning upon him a beseeching—inquiring glance, exclaimed in a voice which ineffable anguish could not rob of its melody, “Is it true—Oh! tell me, is it true that the Count of Riverola is no more?”

“It is, alas! too true, lady,” answered Francisco, in a tone of the deepest melancholy.

The heart of the fair stranger rebounded at the words which thus seemed to destroy a last hope that lingered in her soul; and a hysterical shriek burst from her lips as she threw her snow-white arms, bare to the shoulders, around the head of the pall-covered coffin.

“Oh! my much-loved—my noble Andrea!” she exclaimed, a torrent of tears now rushing from her eyes.

“That voice!—is it possible?” cried one of the spectators, who had hitherto been standing, as before said, at a respectful distance: and the speaker—a man of tall, commanding form, graceful demeanour, wondrously handsome countenance, and rich attire—immediately hurried towards the spot where the young female still clung to the coffin, no one having the heart to remove her.

The individual who had thus stepped forward gave one rapid but searching glance at the lady’s countenance, and, yielding to the surprise and joy which suddenly animated him, he exclaimed, “Yes—it is, indeed, the lost Agnes!”

The young female started when she heard her name thus pronounced in a place where she believed herself to be entirely unknown; and astonishment for an instant triumphed over the anguish of her heart.

Hastily withdrawing her snow-white arms from the head of the coffin, she turned towards the individual who had uttered her name; and he instantly clasped her in his arms, murmuring, “Dearest—dearest Agnes: art thou restored—”

But the lady shrieked, and struggled to escape from that tender embrace, exclaiming, "What means this insolence? will no one protect me?"

"That will I," said Francisco, darting forward, and tearing her away from the stranger's arms. "But, in the name of heaven! let this misunderstanding be cleared up elsewhere. Lady—and you, signor—I call on you to remember where you are, and how solemn a ceremony ye have both aided to interrupt!"

"I know not that man!" ejaculated Agnes, indicating the stranger. "I came hither because I heard but an hour ago—that my noble Andrea was no more. And I would not believe those who told me. Oh! no—I could not think that heaven had thus deprived me of all I loved on earth!"

"Lady, you are speaking of my father," said Francisco, in a somewhat severe tone.

"Your father!" cried Agnes, now surveying the young Count with interest and curiosity. "Oh! then, my lord, you can pity—you can feel for me, who in losing your father have lost all that could render existence sweet."

"No—you have not lost all!" exclaimed the handsome, noble looking stranger, advancing towards Agnes, and speaking in a profoundly impressive tone. "Have you not one single relative left in the world? Consider, lady—an old, old man—a shepherd in the great Black Forest of Germany—"

"Speak not of him!" cried Agnes, wildly. "Did he know all, he would curse me—he would spurn me from him—he would discard me for ever! Oh! when I think of that poor old man, with his venerable white hair—that aged, helpless man who was so kind to me—who loved me so well—and whom I so cruelly abandoned—But tell me, signor," she exclaimed, in a suddenly altered tone, while her breath came with the difficulty of acute suspense,—"tell me, signor, does that old man still live?"

"He lives, Agnes," was the reply. "I know him well:—at this moment he is in Florence!"

"In Florence!" repeated Agnes, and so unexpectedly came this announcement that her limbs seemed to give way under her, and she would have fallen on the marble pavement, had not the stranger caught her in his arms.

"I will bear her away," he said: "she has a sincere friend in me."

And he was moving off with his senseless burden, when Francisco, struck by a sudden idea, caught him by the elegantly slashed sleeve of his doublet, and whispered thus, in a rapid tone:—"From the few, but significant, words which fell from that lady's lips, and from her still more impressive conduct, it would appear, alas! that my deceased father had wronged her. If so, signor, it will be my duty to make her all the reparation that can be afforded in such a case."

"This well, my lord," answered the stranger, in a cold and haughty tone. "To-morrow evening I will call upon you at your palace."

He then hurried on with the still senseless Agnes in his arms; and the Count of Riverola retraced his steps to the immediate vicinity of the coffin.

This scene, which so strangely interrupted the funeral ceremony, and which has taken so much space to describe, did not actually occupy ten minutes from the moment when the young lady first appeared in the church until that when she was borne away by the handsome stranger.

The funeral obsequies were completed: the coffin was lowered into the family vault: the spectators dispersed, and the mourners, headed by the young Count, returned in procession to the Riverola mansion, which was situate at no great distance.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE READING OF THE WILL.

WHEN the mourners reached the palace, Francisco led the way to an apartment where Nisida was awaiting their coming.

Francisco kissed her affectionately upon the forehead; and then took his seat at the head of the table, his sister placing herself on his right hand.

Dressed in deep mourning, and with her countenance unusually pale, Nisida's appearance inspired a feeling of profound interest in the minds of those who did not perceive that, beneath her calm and mournful demeanour, feelings of painful intensity agitated within her breast. But Dr. Duras, who knew her well,—better, far better

than even her own brother, noticed an occasional wild flashing of the eye—a nervous motion of the lips—and a degree of forced tranquillity of mien, which proved how acute was the suspense she in reality endured!

On Francisco's left hand the Notary-General, who had acted as one of the chief mourners, took a seat. He was a short, thin, middle-aged man, with a pale complexion, twinkling grey eyes, and a sharp expression of countenance. Before him lay a sealed packet, on which the eyes of Nisida darted at short intervals, looks the burning impatience of which were comprehended by Dr. Duras alone: for next to Signor Vivaldi the Notary-General—and consequently opposite to Nisida—at the physician.

The remainder of the company consisted of Father Marco and those most intimate friends of the family who had been invited to the funeral; but whom it is unnecessary to describe more particularly.

Father Marco having recited a short prayer, in obedience to the custom of the age and the occasion, the Notary-General proceeded to break the seals of the large packet which lay before him: then, in a precise and methodical manner, he drew forth a sheet of parchment closely written on.

Nisida leant her right elbow upon the table, and half-buried her countenance in the snowy cambric handkerchief which she held.

The Notary-General commenced the reading of the will.

After bestowing a few legacies, one of which was in favour of Dr. Duras, and another in that of Signor Vivaldi himself, the testamentary document ordained that the estates of the late Andrea, Count of Riverola, should be held in trust by the Notary-General and the physician, for the benefit of Francisco, who was merely to enjoy the revenues produced by the same until the age of thirty, at which period the guardianship was to cease, and Francisco was then to enter into full and uncontrolled possession of those immense estates.

But to this clause there was an important condition attached; for the testamentary document ordained that should the Lady Nisida—either by medical skill, or the interposition of heaven—recover the faculties of hearing and speaking at any time during the interval which was to elapse ere Francisco would attain the age of thirty, then the whole of the estates, with the exception of a very small one in the northern part of Tuscany, were to be immediately made over to her; but without the power of alienation on her part.

It must be observed that, in the middle ages, many titles of nobility depended only on the feudal possession of a particular property. This was the case with the Riverola estates; and the title of "Count of Riverola" was conferred simply by the fact of the ownership of the landed property. Thus, supposing that Nisida became possessed of the estates, she would have enjoyed the title of "Countess," while her brother Francisco would have lost that of "Count."

We may also remind our readers that Francisco was now nineteen; and eleven years must consequently elapse ere he could become the lord and master of the vast territorial possessions of Riverola.

Great was the astonishment experienced by all who heard the provisions of this strange will—with the exception of the Notary-General and Father Marco, the former of whom had drawn it up, and the latter of whom was privy to its contents (though under a vow of secrecy) in his capacity of father-confessor to the late Count.

Francisco was himself surprised, and, in one sense, hurt; because the nature of the testamentary document seemed to imply that the property would have been inevitably left to his sister, with but a very small provision for himself, had she not been so sorely afflicted as she was; and this fact forced upon him the painful conviction that even when contemplating his departure to another world, his father had not softened towards his son!

But, on the other hand, Francisco was pleased that such consideration had been shown towards a sister whom he so devotedly loved; and he hastened, as soon as he could conquer his first emotions, to request the Notary-General to permit Nisida to peruse the will, adding in a mournful tone, "For all that your Excellency has read, has been, alas! unavailing in respect to her."

Signor Vivaldi handed the document to the young Count, who gently touched his sister's shoulder and placed the parchment before her.

Nisida started, as if convulsively; and raised from her

handkerchief a countenance so pale—so deadly pale, that Francisco shrank back in alarm.

But instantly reflecting that the process of reading aloud a paper had been as it were a kind of mockery in respect to his afflicted sister, he pressed her hand tenderly, and made a sign for her to peruse the document.

She mechanically addressed herself to the task; but ere her eyes—now of burning, unearthly brilliancy—fell upon the parchment, they darted one rapid, electric glance of ineffable anguish towards Dr. Duras, adown whose cheeks large tears were trickling.

In a few minutes Nisida appeared to be absorbed in the perusal of the will; and the most solemn silence prevailed throughout the apartment.

At length she started violently, tossed the paper indignantly back to the Notary-General, and hastily wrote on a slip of paper these words:—"Should medical skill or the mercy of heaven restore my speech and faculty of hearing, I will abandon all claim to the estates and title of Riverola to my dear brother Francisco."

She then handed the slip to the Notary-General, who read the contents aloud.

Francisco darted upon his sister a look of ineffable gratitude and love, but shook his head—as much as to imply that he would not accept the boon, even if circumstances enabled her to confer it.

She returned the look with another, expressive of impatience at his refusal; and her eyes seemed to say, as eloquently as eyes ever yet spoke, "Oh! that I had the power to give verbal utterance to my feelings!"

Meantime the Notary-General had written a few words beneath those penned by Nisida, to whom he handed back the slip; and she hastened to read them, thus:—"Your ladyship has no power to alienate the estates, should they come into your possession."

Nisida burst into an agony of tears and rushed from the room.

Her brother immediately followed to console her; and the company retired, each individual to his own abode.

But of all that company who had been present at the reading of the will, none experienced such painful emotions as Dr. Duras.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PICTURES.—AGNES AND THE UNKNOWN.— MYSTERY.

WHEN Agnes awoke from the state of stupor in which she had been conveyed from the church, she found herself lying upon an ottoman, in a large and elegantly furnished apartment.

The room was lighted by two silver lamps suspended to the ceiling, and which being fed with aromatic oil of the purest quality, imparted a delicious perfume to the atmosphere.

The walls were hung with paintings representing scenes of strange variety and interest, and connected with lands far—far away. Thus, one depicted a council of Red Men assembled round a blazing fire, on the border of one of the great forests of North America; another showed the interior of an Esquimaux hut amidst the eternal ice of the Pole;—a third delineated, with fearfully graphic truth, the writhings of a human victim in the folds of the terrible anaconda in the island of Ceylon;—a fourth exhibited a pleasing contrast to the one previously cited, by having for its subject a family meeting of Chinese on the terraced roof of a high functionary's palace at Pekin; a fifth represented the splendid Court of King Henry the Eighth in London;—a sixth showed the interior of the harem of the Ottoman Sultan.

But there were two portraits amongst this beautiful and varied collection of pictures, all of which, we should observe, appeared to have been very recently executed—two portraits which we must pause to describe. One represented a tall man of about forty years of age, with magnificent light hair—fine blue eyes, but terrible in their expression—a countenance indubitably handsome, though every lineament denoted horror and alarm—and a symmetrical form, bowed by the weight of sorrow. Beneath this portrait was the following inscription:—"F. Count of A., terminated his career on the 1st of August, 1517."

The other portrait alluded to was that of an old—old man, who had apparently numbered ninety winters. He was represented as cowering over a few embers in a miserable hovel, while the most profound sorrow was depicted on his countenance. Beneath this picture was

the ensuing inscription:—"F. W., January 7th, 1516. His last day thus."

There was another feature in that apartment to which we must likewise direct our reader's attention, ere we pursue the thread of our narrative. This was an object hanging against the wall, next to the second portrait just now described. It also had the appearance of being a picture—or at all events a frame of the same dimensions as the others; but whether that frame contained a painting, or whether it were empty, it was impossible to say, so long as it remained concealed by the large black cloth which covered it, and which was carefully fastened by small silver nails at each corner.

This strange object gave a lugubrious and sinister appearance to a room in other respects cheerful, gay, and elegant.

But to resume our tale.

When Agnes awoke from her stupor, she found herself reclining on a soft ottoman of purple velvet, fringed with gold; and the handsome stranger, who had borne her from the church, was bathing her brow with water which he took from a crystal vase on the marble table.

As she languidly and slowly opened her large hazel eyes, her thoughts collected themselves in the same gradient manner; and when her glance encountered that of her unknown friend, who was bending over her with an expression of deep interest on his features, there flashed upon her mind a recollection of all that had so recently taken place.

"Where am I?" she demanded, starting up, and casting her eyes wildly around her.

"In the abode of one who will not injure you," answered the stranger, in a kind and melodious tone.

"But who are you? and wherefore have you brought me hither?" exclaimed Agnes. "Oh! I remember—you spoke of that old man—my grandfather—the shepherd of the Black Forest!"

"You shall see him—you shall be restored to him," answered the stranger.

"But will he receive—will he not spurn me from him?" asked Agnes, in a wildly impassioned—almost hysterical tone.

"The voice of pity cannot refuse to heave a sigh for thy fall," was the response. "If thou wast guilty in abandoning one who loved thee so tenderly, and whose only earthly reliance was on thee, he, whom you did so abandon, has not the less need to ask pardon of thee. For he speedily forgot his darling Agnes—he travelled the world over, yet sought her not—her image was as it were effaced from his memory. But when accident—"

"Oh! signor, you are mistaken—you know not the old man whom I deserted, and who was a shepherd on the verge of the Black Forest!" interrupted Agnes, in a tone expressive of bitter disappointment. "For he, who loved me so well, was old—very old, and could not possibly accomplish those long wanderings of which you speak. Indeed, if he be still alive—but that is scarcely possible—"

And she burst into tears.

"Agnes," cried the stranger, "the venerable shepherd of whom you speak, accomplished those wanderings in spite of the ninety winters which marked his age. He is alive, too!"

"He is alive!" ejaculated the lady, with reviving hope.

"He is alive—and at this moment in Florence!" was the emphatic answer. "Did I not ere now tell thee as much in the church?"

"Yes—I remember—but my brain is confused!" murmured Agnes, pressing her beautiful white hand upon her polished brow. "Oh! if he be indeed alive—and so near me as you say—delay not in conducting me to him; for he is now the only being on earth to whom I dare look for solace and sympathy."

"You are even now beneath the roof of your grandfather's dwelling," said the stranger, speaking slowly, and anxiously watching the effect which this announcement was calculated to produce upon her to whom he addressed himself.

"Here!—this my grandsire's abode!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, and glancing upward, as if to express gratitude to heaven for this welcome intelligence. "But how can that old man, whom I left so poor, have become the owner of this lordly place? Speak, signor!—all you have told me seems to involve some mystery," she added with breathless rapidity. "Those wanderings of which you ere now spoke—wanderings over the world, performed by a man bent down by age;—and then this noble dwelling—the appearances of

wealth which present themselves around—the splendour—the magnificence—

"All—all are the old man's," answered the stranger, "and may some day become thine!"

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Agnes, sinking upon the ottoman from which she had ere now risen, "I thank thee that thou hast bestowed those blessings on my relative in his old age. And yet," she added, again overwhelmed by doubts, "it is scarcely possible—no—it is too romantic to be true! Signor, thou art of a surety mistaken in him whom thou supposeth to be my grandsire!"

"Give me thine hand, Agnes—and I will convince thee," said the stranger.

The young lady complied mechanically; and her unknown friend led her towards the portrait of the old man of ninety.

Agnes recognised the countenance at a single glance, and would have fallen upon the floor had not her companion supported her in his arms.

Tears again came to her relief; but, hastily wiping them away, she extended her arms passionately towards the portrait, exclaiming, "Oh! now I comprehend you, signor!—my grandsire lives in this dwelling indeed—beneath this roof—but lives only in that picture! Alas! alas! it was thus, no doubt that the poor old man seemed when he was abandoned by me—the lost, the guilty Agnes! It was thus that he sat in his lonely dwelling, crushed and overwhelmed by the black ingratitude of his grand-daughter! Oh! that I had never seen this portrait—this perpetuation of so much loneliness and so much grief! Ah! too faithful delineation of that sad scene which was wrought by me—by me, wanton that I was—vainly penitent that I am!"

And covering her face with her hands, she threw herself on her knees before the portrait, and gave way to all the bitterness and all the wildness of her grief.

The stranger interrupted her not for some minutes: he allowed the flood of that anguish to have its full vent;—but, when it was partially subsiding, he approached the kneeling penitent, raised her gently, and said, "Despair not! your grandsire lives."

"He lives!" she repeated, her countenance once more expressing radiant hope, as the sudden gleam of sunshine bursts forth amidst the last drops of the April shower.

But, almost at the same instant that she uttered those words, her eyes caught sight of the inscription at the foot of the picture; and, bounding forward, she read it aloud.

"Holy Virgin! I am deceived—basely, vilely deceived!" she continued, all the violence of her grief, which had begun to ebb so rapidly, now flowing back upon her soul: then, turning abruptly round upon the stranger, she said in a hoarse hollow tone, "Signor, wherefore thus ungenerously trifles with my feelings—my best feelings? Who art thou? what wouldst thou with me? and wherefore is that portrait here?"

"Agnes—Agnes!" exclaimed her companion, "compose yourself, I implore you! I do not trifle with you—I do not deceive you! Your grandsire, Ferdinand Wagner, is alive—and in this house. You shall see him presently; but, in the meantime, listen to what I am about to say."

Agnes placed her finger impatiently upon the inscription at the bottom of the portrait; and exclaimed in a wild, hysterical tone, "Canst thou explain this, signor? 'January 17th, 1516'—that was about a week after I abandoned him: and, Oh! well indeed might those words be added—'His last day thus!'"

"You comprehend not the meaning of that inscription," ejaculated the stranger, in an imploring tone, as if to beseech her to have patience and listen to him. "There is a dreadful mystery connected with Ferdinand Wagner—connected with me—connected with these two portraits—connected also with—"

He checked himself suddenly, and his whole form seemed convulsed with horror as he glanced towards the black cloth covering the neighbouring frame.

"A mystery!" repeated Agnes. "Yes—all is mystery; and vague and undefinable terrors oppress my soul!"

"Thou shalt soon—too soon be enlightened!" said the stranger, in a voice of profound melancholy: "at least, to a certain degree," he added, murmuringly. "But contemplate that other portrait for a few moments—that you may make yourself acquainted with the countenance of a wretch who, in conferring a fearful boon upon your grandsire, has plunged him into an abyss of unredeemable horror!"

Agnes cast her looks towards the portrait of the tall man with the magnificent hair, the flashing blue eyes,

the wildly expressive countenance, and the symmetrical form bowed with affliction; and, having surveyed it for some time with repugnance strangely mingled with an invincible interest and curiosity, she suddenly pointed towards the inscription.

"Yes—yes: this is another terrible memorial!" cried the stranger. "But art thou now prepared to listen to a wondrous—an astounding tale—such a tale as even nurses would scarcely dare narrate to lull sleepless children—"

"I am prepared," answered Agnes. "I perceive there is a dreadful mystery connected with my grandsire—with you also—and perhaps with me; and better learn at once the truth, than remain in this state of intolerable suspense."

Her unknown friend conducted her back to the ottoman, whereon she placed herself.

He took a seat by her side, and, after a few moments' profound meditation addressed her in the following manner.

## CHAPTER VII.

### REVELATIONS.

"You remember, Agnes, how happily the time passed when you were the darling of the old man in his poor cottage. All the other members of his once numerous family had been swept away by pestilence, malady, accident, or violence; and you only were left to him. When the trees of the great Black Forest were full of life and vegetable blood, in the genial warmth of summer, you gathered flowers which you arranged tastefully in the little hut; and those gifts of Nature, so culled and so dispensed from your hands, gave the dwelling a more cheerful air than if it had been hung with tapestry richly fringed. Of an evening—when the setting sun, with its sheen, overflowed the western plains as with glowing gold—you were wont to kneel by the side of that old shepherd; and together ye chanted a hymn giving thanks for the mercies of the day, and imploring the renewal of them for the morrow. Then did the music of your sweet voice, as it flowed upon the old man's ears in its melting, silvery tones, possess a charm for his senses, which taught him to rejoice and be grateful that, though the rest of the race were swept away, thou, Agnes, was left!"

"When the winter came, and the trees were stripped of their verdure, the poor cottage had still its enjoyments; for though the cold was intense without, yet there were warm hearts within; and the cheerful fire of an evening when the labours of the day were passed, seemed to make gay and joyous companionship."

"But suddenly you disappeared,—and the old man found himself deserted. You left him, too, in the midst of winter—at a time when his age and infirmities demanded additional attentions. For two or three days he sped wearily about, seeking you everywhere in the neighbouring district of the Black Forest. His aching limbs were dragged up rude heights, that he might plunge his glances down into the hollow chasms;—but not a trace of Agnes! He roved along the precipices overlooking the rushing streams, and searched—diligently searched the mazes of the dark wood—but still not a trace—not a trace of Agnes! At length the painful conviction broke upon him that he was deserted—abandoned:—and he would sooner have found thee a mangled and disfigured corpse in the forest, than have adopted that belief. Nay—weep not now: it is all past,—and if I recapitulate these incidents, it is but to convince thee how wretched the old man was, and how great is the extenuation for the course he was so soon persuaded to adopt."

"Then, who art thou that knowest all this?" exclaimed Agnes, casting looks of alarm upon her companion.

"Thou shalt soon learn who I am," was the mysterious reply.

Agnes still gazed upon him in mingled terror and wonder; for his words had gone to her heart, and she remembered how he had embraced her when she first encountered him in the church. His manner, too, was so kind—so mild—so paternal towards her; and yet he seemed but a few years older than herself!

"You have gazed upon the portrait of the old man," he continued, "as he appeared on that memorable evening which sealed his fate!"

Agnes started wildly.

"Yes—sealed his fate, but spared him his life!" said the unknown, emphatically. "As he is represented in



that picture, so was he sitting mournfully over the sorry fate, for the morrow's renewal of which there was no wood! At that hour a man appeared—appeared in the midst of the dreadful storm which burst over the Black Forest. This man's countenance is now known to thee: it is perpetuated in the other portrait to which I directed thine attention."

"There is something of a wild and fearful interest in the aspect of that man," said Agnes, casting a shuddering glance behind her, and trembling lest the canvas had burst into life, and the countenance whose lineaments were depicted thereon, was peering over her shoulder.

"Yes—and there was much of wild and fearful interest in his history," was the reply: "but of that I cannot speak—no, I dare not. Suffice it to say that he was a being possessed of superhuman powers, and that he proffered his services to the wretched—the abandoned—the deserted Wagner. He proposed to endow him with a new existence—to restore him to youth and manly beauty—to make him rich—to embellish his mind with wondrous attainments—to enable him to cast off the wrinkles of age."

"Holy Virgin! now I comprehend it all!" shrieked Agnes, throwing herself at the feet of her companion: "and you—you—"

"I am Fernand Wagner!" he exclaimed, folding her in his embrace.

"And can you pardon me—can you forgive my deep, deep ingratitude?" cried Agnes.

"Let us forgive each other!" said Wagner. "You can now understand the meaning of the inscription beneath my portrait. 'His last day thus' signifies that it was the last day on which I wore that aged, decrepit, and sinking form."

"But wherefore do you say, 'Let us forgive each other'?" demanded Agnes, scarcely knowing whether to rejoice or weep at the marvellous transformation of her grand-sire.

"Did I not ere now inform thee that thou wert forgotten until accident threw thee in my way to-night?" exclaimed Fernand. "I have wandered about the earth and beheld the scenes which are represented in those pictures—aye, and many others equally remarkable. For eighteen months I was the servant—the slave of him who conferred upon me this fatal boon—"

"At what price then have you purchased it?" asked Agnes, with a cold shudder.

"Seek not to learn my secret, girl!" cried Wagner, almost sternly; then, in a milder tone, he added, "By all you deem holy and sacred I conjure you, Agnes, never again to question me on that head; I have told thee as much as it is necessary for thee to know."

"One word—only one word!" exclaimed Agnes, in an imploring voice. "Hast thou bartered thine immortal soul—"

"No—no!" responded Wagner, emphatically. "My fate is terrible indeed—but I am not beyond the pale of salvation. 'See, Agnes—I kiss this crucifix—the symbol of faith and hope'—"

And, as he uttered these words, he pressed to his lips an ivory crucifix of exquisite workmanship which he took from the table.

"The Virgin be thanked that my fearful suspicion should prove unfounded!" ejaculated Agnes.

"Yes—I am not altogether lost," answered Wagner.

"But he—the unhappy man who made me what I am—And yet I dare not say more," he added, suddenly checking himself. "For one year and a half did I follow him as his servant—profiting by his knowledge—gaining varied information from his experience—passing with the rapidity of thought from clime to clime—surveying scenes of ineffable bliss—and studying all the varieties of misery that it is the lot of human nature to endure. When he—my master—passed away—"

"On the 1st of August, 1517," observed Agnes, quoting the inscription beneath the portrait of the individual alluded to.

"Yes!—when he had passed away," continued Wagner. "I continued my wanderings alone until the commencement of last year, when I settled myself in Florence. The mansion to which I have brought you, is mine. It is a somewhat secluded spot—on the banks of the Arno, and is surrounded by gardens. My household consists of but few retainers; and they are elderly persons—docile and obedient. The moment that I entered this abode, I set to work to paint those portraits to which I have directed your attention,—likewise these pictures," he added, glancing around, "and in which I have represented

scenes that my own eyes have witnessed. Here, henceforth, Agnes, shalt thou dwell; and let the past be forgotten. But there are three conditions which I must impose upon thee."

"Name them," said Agnes. "I promise obedience beforehand."

"The first," returned Fernand, "is that you henceforth look upon me as your brother, and call me such when we are alone together or in the presence of strangers. The second is that you never seek to remove the black cloth which covers your place."

Agnes glanced towards the object alluded to, and shuddered—as if that dark veil concealed some new mystery.

"And the third condition is that you revive not on any future occasion the subject of our present conversation, nor ever question me in respect to those secrets which it may suit me to retain in my own breast."

Agnes promised obedience, and, embracing Wagner, said, "Heaven has been merciful to me in my present affliction, in that it has given me a brother!"

"Thou speakest of this affliction, Agnes!" exclaimed Wagner: "this is the night of revelations and mutual confidence—and this night once past, we will never again allude to the present topics, unless events should render their revival necessary. It is now for thee to narrate to me all that has befallen thee since the winter of 1516."

Agnes hastened to comply with Fernand's request, and commenced her history in the following manner.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HISTORY OF AGNES.

"WHEN you, dear brother—for so I shall henceforth call you—commenced your strange and wondrous revelations ere now, you painted in vivid colours the happiness which dwelt in our poor cottage on the borders of the Black Forest. You saw how deeply your words affected me—I could not restrain my tears. Let me not, however, dwell upon this subject; but rather hasten to explain those powerful causes which induced me to quit that happy home."

It was about six weeks before my flight, that I one day went into the forest to gather wood. I was in the midst of my occupation, gaily thrilling a native song, when the sound of a horse's feet upon the hard soil of the beaten path suddenly interrupted me. I turned round, and beheld a cavalier of strikingly handsome countenance, though somewhat stern withal,—and of noble mien. He was in reality forty-four years of age,—as I afterwards learnt; but he seemed scarcely forty, so lightly did time sit upon his brow. His dress was elegant, though of strange fashion; for it was the Italian costume that he wore. The moment he was close to the spot where I stood, he considered me for a short while, till I felt my cheek glowing beneath his ardent gaze. I cast down my eyes; and the next instant he had leaped from his horse and was by my side. He addressed me in gentle terms; and when I again looked at him his countenance no longer seemed stern. It appeared that he was staying with the Baron von Nanenberg, with whom he had been hunting in the Black Forest, and from whom and his suite he was separated in the ardour of the chase. Being a total stranger in those parts he had lost his way. I immediately described to him the proper path to pursue; and he offered me gold as a recompense. I declined the gerund; and he questioned me concerning my family and position. I told him that I lived hard by with an only relative—a grandsire, to whom I was devotedly attached. He lingered long in conversation with me; and his manner was so kind—so condescending—and so respectful, that I thought not I was doing wrong to listen to him. At length he requested me to be on the same spot at the same hour on the morrow; and he departed.

"I was struck by his appearance—dazzled by the brilliancy of his discourse; for he spoke German fluently, although an Italian. He had made a deep impression on my mind; and I felt a secret longing to meet him again. Suddenly it occurred to me that I was acting with impropriety, and that you would be angry with me. I therefore resolved not to mention to you my accidental encounter with the handsome cavalier; but I determined at the same time, not to repair to the forest next day. When the appointed hour drew near, my good genius deserted me; and I went. He was there—and he seemed pleased at my punctuality. I need not detail to you the

mature of the discourse which he held towards me. Suffice it to say, that he declared how much he had been struck with my beauty, and how fondly he would love me: then he dazzled me still more by revealing his haughty name: and I found that I was beloved by the Count of Riverola.

"You can understand how a poor girl, who had hitherto dwelt in the seclusion of a cottage on the border of a vast wood, and who seldom saw any person of higher rank than herself, was likely to be dazzled by the fine things which that great nobleman breathed in her ear. And I was dazzled—flattered—excited—bewildered,

whither important affairs called him sooner than he had anticipated. He urged me to accompany him: I was bewildered—maddened by the contemplation of my duty on the one hand, and of my love on the other. My guardian saint deserted me; I yielded to the persuasion of the Count—I became guilty—and there was now no alternative save to fly with him!

"Oh! believe me when I declare that this decision cost me a dreadful pang: but the Count would not leave me time for reflection. He bore me away on his fleet steed, and halted not until the tall towers of Naumburg Castle appeared in the distance. Then he stopped

"SHE FOUND HERSELF RECLINING ON A SOFT OTTOMAN." (Sec p. 14.)

I consented to meet him again: interview followed interview, until I no longer required any persuasion to induce me to keep the appointments thus given. But there were times when my conscience reproached me for my conduct, which I knew you would blame: and yet I dared not unburden my soul to you!

"Six weeks thus passed away: I was still innocent—but madly in love with the Count of Riverola. He was the subject of my thoughts by day—of my dreams by night; and I felt that I could make any sacrifice to retain his affection. That sacrifice was too soon demanded! At the expiration of the six weeks he informed me that on the following day he must return to Italy

at a poor peasant's cottage, where his gold ensured me a welcome reception. Having communicated the plan which he proposed to adopt respecting our journey to Florence, he took an affectionate leave of me, with a promise to return early on the ensuing morning. The remainder of the day was passed wretchedly enough by me: and I already began to repent of the step I had taken. The peasants who occupied the cottage vainly endeavoured to cheer me; my heart was too full to admit of consolation. Night came at length, and I retired to rest; but my dreams were of so unpleasant a nature—so filled with frightful images—that never did I welcome the dawn with more enthusiastic joy. Shortly after day

break the Count appeared at the cottage attended by only one of the numerous suite—a faithful dependant on whom he could rely implicitly. They were mounted on good steeds; and Antonio—such was the name of the servant—led a third by the bridle. This one the Count had purchased at an adjacent hamlet, expressly for my use. He had also procured a page's attire; for in such disguise was it agreed that I should accompany the Count to Italy.

"I should observe that the nobleman, in order to screen our amour as much as possible, had set out from Naumburg Castle, attended by Antonio alone, alleging as an excuse that certain affairs compelled him to travel homeward with as much celerity as possible. The remainder of his suite were therefore ordered to follow at their leisure.

"Oh! with what agonizing emotions did my heart beat, as, in a private chamber of the cottage, I laid aside my peasant's garb and donned the doublet, hose, cap, and cloak of a youthful page. I thought of you—of your helplessness—your age—and also of my native land, which I was about to quit—perhaps for ever! Still I had gone too far to retreat, and regrets were useless. I must also confess that when I returned to the room where the Count was waiting for me, and heard the flattering compliments which were paid me on my appearance in that disguise, I smiled—yes, I smiled, and much of my remorse vanished!

"We set out upon our journey towards the Alps: and the Count exerted all his powers of conversation to chase away from my mind any regrets or repinings that might linger there. Though cold and stern—f forbidding and reserved—haughty and austere in his bearing towards others, to me he was affectionate and tender. To be brief,—yet with sorrow must I confess it, at the expiration of a few days I could bear to think without weeping, of the fond relative whom I had left behind me in the cottage of the Black Forest.

"We crossed the Alps in safety, but not without having experienced much peril: and in a short time glorious Italy spread itself at our feet. The conversation of the Count had already prepared me to admire—"

At this moment Agnes's narrative was interrupted by a piercing shriek which burst from her lips; and extending her arms towards the window of the apartment, she screamed hysterically—"Again that countenance!"—and fell back on the ottoman.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF AGNES.

In order that the reader may understand how Agnes could perceive any object outside the window in the intense darkness of that tempestuous night—or rather morning, for it was now past one o'clock—we must observe that not only was the apartment in which Wagner and herself were seated brilliantly lighted by the silver lamps, but that, according to Florentine custom, there were also lamps suspended outside to the verandah, or large balcony belonging to the casements of the room above.

Agnes and Wagner were moreover placed near the window, which looked into a large garden attached to the mansion; and thus it was easy for the lady, whose eyes happened to be fixed upon the casement in the earnest interest with which she was relating her narrative, to perceive the human countenance that suddenly appeared at one of the panes.

The moment her history was interrupted by the ejaculation of alarm which broke from her lips, Wagner started up and hastened to the window: but he could see nothing save the waving evergreens in his garden, and the lights of a mansion which stood at a distance of about two hundred yards from his own abode.

He was about to open the casement and step into the garden, when Agnes caught him by the arm exclaiming wildly, "Leave me not—I could not bear to remain here alone!"

"No—I will not quit you, Agnes," replied Wagner, conducting her back to the sofa and resuming his seat by her side. "But wherefore that ejaculation of alarm? Whose countenance did you behold? Speak, dearest Agnes!"

"I will hasten to explain the cause of my terror," returned Agnes, becoming more composed. "Ere now I was about to detail the particulars of my journey to Florence, in company with the Count of Riverola, and

attended by Antonio: but as those particulars are of no material interest, I will at once pass on to the period when we arrived in this city."

"But the countenance at the window?" said Wagner, somewhat emphatically.

"Listen—and you will soon know all," replied Agnes. "It was in the evening when I entered Florence for the first time. Antonio had proceeded in advance to inform his mother—a widow who resided in a decent house, but in an obscure street near the cathedral—that she was speedily to receive a young lady as a guest. This young lady was myself, and accordingly, when the Count assisted me to alight from my horse at the gate of Dame Margaretha's abode, the good widow had everything in readiness for my reception. The Count conversed with her apart for a few minutes; and I observed that he also placed a heavy purse in her hand—doubtless to ensure her secrecy relative to the amour, with the existence of which he was of course compelled to acquaint her. Having seen me comfortably installed in Dame Margaretha's best apartment, he quitted me with a promise to return on the morrow.

Agnes paused for a few moments—sighed and continued her narrative in the following manner:

"Fortunately for me, Dame Margaretha was a German woman who had married an Italian: and we were therefore able to converse together: otherwise my position would have been wretched in the extreme. She treated me with kindness, mingled with respect; for though but a poor peasant girl, I was beloved and protected by one of the most powerful nobles of Florence. I retired early to rest—sleep did not, however, immediately visit my eyes. Oh! no—I was in Florence, but my thoughts were far away—in my native Germany, and on the borders of the Black Forest. At length I fell into an uneasy slumber; and when I awoke, the sun was shining through the lattice. I rose to dress myself: and to my ineffable delight, I found that I was no longer to wear the garb of a page. That disguise had been removed while I slept; and in its place were costly vestments, which I donned with a pleasure that triumphed over the gloom of my soul. In the course of the morning rich furniture was brought to the house, and in a few hours the two apartments allotted to me were converted, in my estimation, into a little paradise. The Count arrived soon afterwards; and I now pardon me the neglect and ingratitude which my ~~former~~ <sup>present</sup> confessor, I now felt very happy. The noble Antonio enjoined me to go abroad but seldom, and never without being accompanied by Dame Margaretha. He also besought me not to appear to recognize him; should I chance to meet him in public at any time,—nor to form any acquaintances; in a word, to live as retired and secluded as possible, alike for his sake and my own. I promised compliance with all he suggested: and he declared in return that he would never cease to love me.

"Dwell not upon details, Agnes," said Wagner, "for although I am deeply interested in your narrative, my curiosity is strangely excited to learn the meaning of that terror which overcame you ere now."

"I will confine myself to material facts as much as possible," returned Agnes. "The time glided rapidly away; weeks—months flew by,—and, with sorrow and shame must I confess, that the memories of the past—the memories of the days of my innocence—intruded but little on the life which I led. For, though he was so much older than I, yet I loved the Count of Riverola devotedly. Oh! heaven knows how devotedly! His conversation delighted and fascinated me; and he seemed to experience a pleasure in imparting to me the extensive knowledge which he had acquired. To me he unbent as doubtless to human being he never unbent before; in my presence his sternness—his sombre moods—his gloomy thoughts vanished. It was evident that he had much to prey upon his mind; and perhaps he loved me thus fondly, because—by some unaccountable whim or caprice, or strange influence—he found solace in my society. The presents which he heaped upon me, but which have been nearly all snatched from me, were of immense value! and when I remonstrated with him on account of his liberality so useless to one whom he had allowed to wait for nothing, he would reply, 'But remember, Agnes, which I shall be no more, riches will constitute your best friend—your safest protection; for such is the order of things in this world.'—He generally spent two hours with me every day, and frequently visited me again in the evening. Thus did time pass; and at length I come to that incident which will explain the terror I ere now experienced."

Agnes cast a hasty glance towards the window, as if to assure herself that the object of her fears was no longer there; and satisfied on this head, she proceeded in the following manner:—

"It was about six months ago, that I repaired as usual on the Sabbath morning to mass, accompanied by Dame Margaretha, when I found myself the object of some attention on the part of a lady, who was kneeling at a short distance from the place which I occupied in the church. The lady was enveloped in a dark, thick veil, the ample folds of which concealed her countenance, and meandered over her whole body's splendidly symmetrical length of limb in such a manner as to aid her rich attire in shaping, rather than hiding, the contours of that matchless form. I was struck by her fine proportions, which gave her, even in her kneeling attitude, a queen-like and majestic air; and I longed to obtain a glimpse of her countenance—the more so as I could perceive by her manner and the position of her head, that from beneath her dark veil her eyes were intently fixed upon myself. At length the scrutiny to which I was thus subjected began to grow so irksome—nay, even alarming, that I hurriedly drew down my own veil, which I had raised through respect for the sacred altar whereat I was kneeling. Still I knew that the stranger-lady was gazing on me: I felt that she was. A certain uneasy sensation—amounting almost to a superstitious awe—convinced me that I was the object of her undivided attention. Suddenly the priests, in procession, came down from the altar, and as they passed us, I instinctively raised my veil again through motives of deferential respect. At the same instant I glanced towards the stranger-lady: she also drew back the dark covering from her face. Oh! what a countenance was then revealed to me!—a countenance of such sovereign beauty, that, though of the same sex, I was struck with admiration; but, in the next moment, a thrill of terror shot through my heart—for the fascination of the basilisk could scarcely paralyze its victim with more appalling effect than did the eyes of that lady. It might be conscience qualms, excited by some unknown influence—it might even have been imagination; but it nevertheless appeared as if those large, black, burning orbs shot forth lightnings which seared and scorched my very soul! For that splendid countenance, of most unearthly beauty, was suddenly marked by an expression of such vindictive rage—such ineffable hatred—such ferocious menace, that I should have screamed had I not been as it were stunned—stupefied!

"The procession of priests swept past: I averted my head from the stranger-lady: in a few moments I again glanced shudderingly towards the place which she had occupied—but she was gone. Then I felt relieved! On quitting the church I frankly narrated to old Margaretha these particulars as I have now unfolded them to you; and methought that she was for a moment troubled as I spoke. But, if she were, she speedily recovered her composure—endeavoured to soothe me by attributing it all to my imagination, and earnestly advised me not to cause any uneasiness to the Count by mentioning the subject to him. I readily promised compliance with this injunction; and in the course of a few days ceased to think upon the incident which had made so strange but evanescent an impression on my mind."

"Doubtless Dame Margaretha was right in her conjecture," said Wagner; "and your imagination—"

"Oh! no—no—it was not fancy!" interrupted Agnes, hastily. "But listen—and then judge for yourself. I informed you ere now that it was about six months ago when the event which I have just related took place. At that period, also, my noble lover—the ever-to-be-lamented Andrea—first experienced the symptoms of that internal disease which has, alas! carried him to the tomb!"

Agnes paused, wiped away her tears, and continued thus:—

"His visits to me consequently became less frequent;—I was more alone—for Margaretha was not always a companion who could solace me for the absence of one so dearly loved as my Andrea;—and repeated fits of deep despondency seized upon my soul. At those times I felt as if some evil—vague and undefinable, but still terrible—were impending over me. Was it my lord's approaching death of which I had a presentiment? I know not! Weeks passed away: the Count's visits occurred at intervals growing longer and longer—but his affection towards me had not abated. No: a malady that preyed upon his vitals, retained him much at home;—and at last, about two months ago, I received, through Antonio,

the afflicting intelligence that he was confined to his bed. My anguish now knew no bounds: I would fly to him—oh! I would fly to him:—who was more worthy to watch by his couch than I, who so dearly loved him? But Dame Margaretha represented to me how painful it would be to his lordship were our amour to transpire through any rash proceeding on my part—the more so, as I knew that he had a daughter and a son! I accordingly restrained my impetuous longing to hasten to his bed-side:—I could not so easily subdue my grief!

"One night I sat up late in my lonely chamber—pondering on the melancholy position in which I was placed,—loving so tenderly, yet not daring to fly to him whom I loved,—and giving way to all the mournful ideas which presented themselves to my imagination. At length my mind grew bewildered by those sad reflections; vague terrors gathered around me—multiplying in number and augmenting in intensity,—until at length the very figures on the tapestry with which the room was hung, appeared animated with power to affright me. The wind moaned ominously without, and raised strange echoes within; oppressive feelings crowded on my soul. At length the gale swelled to a hurricane—a whirlwind, seldom experienced in this delicious clime. Howlings in a thousand tones appeared to flit through the air: and piercing lamentations seemed to sound down from the black clouds that rolled their mighty volumes together, veiling the moon and stars in the thickest gloom. Overcome with terror, I retired to rest—and I slept. But troubled dreams haunted me throughout the night, and I awoke at an early hour in the morning. But—holy angels protect me! what did I behold? Bending over me, as I lay, was that same countenance which I had seen four months before in the church,—and now, as it was then, darting upon me lightnings from large black eyes that seemed to send shafts of flame and fire to the inmost recesses of my soul! Yet—distorted as it was with demoniac rage—that face was still endowed with queen-like beauty—the majesty of loveliness, which had before struck me, and which even lent force to those looks of dreadful menace that were fixed upon me. There were the large forehead—the proud lip, curled in scorn,—the brilliant teeth, glistening between the quivering vermillion,—and the swan-like arching of the dazzling neck;—there also was the dark glory of the luxuriant hair!

"For a few moments I was spell-bound—motionless—speechless. Clothed with terror and sublimity, yet in all the flush of the most perfect beauty, a strange—mysterious being stood over me: and I knew not whether she were a denizen of this world, or a spirit risen from another. Perhaps the transcendent loveliness of that countenance was but a mask, and the wondrous symmetry of that form but a disguise, beneath which all the passions of hell were raging in the brain and in the heart of a fiend. Such were the ideas that flashed through my imagination: and I involuntarily closed my eyes, as if that action could avert the malignity that appeared to menace me. But dreadful thoughts still pursued me—enveloping me, as it were, in an oppressive mist wherein appalling though dimly seen images and forms were agitating: and again I opened my eyes. The lady—if an earthly being she really were—was gone. I rose from my couch, and glanced nervously around—expecting almost to behold an apparition come forth from behind the tapestry, or the folds of the curtains. But my attention was suddenly arrested by a fact more germane to worldly occurrences. The casket wherein I kept the rich presents made to me at different times by my Andrea, had been forced open, and the most valuable portion of its contents were gone. On a closer investigation I observed that the articles which were left were those that had been purchased new; whereas the jewels that were abstracted were old ones, which, as the Count had often informed me, had belonged to his deceased wife.

"On discovering this robbery, I began to suspect that my mysterious visitress, who had caused me so much alarm, was the thief of my property; and I immediately summoned old Margaretha. She was, of course, astounded at the occurrence which I related; and, after some reflection, she suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to fasten the house-door ere she retired to rest on the preceding evening. I chided her for a neglect which had enabled some evil-disposed woman to penetrate into my chamber, and not only terrify but also plunder me. She implored my forgiveness, and besought me not to mention the incident to the Count when next we met. Alas! my noble Andrea and I never met again!

"I was sorely perplexed by the event which I have

just related. If the mysterious visitress were a common thief, why did she leave any of the jewels in the casket? and wherefore had she on two occasions contemplated me with looks of such dark rage and infernal menace? A thought struck me. Could the Count's daughter have discovered our amour? and was it she who had come to regain possession of jewels belonging to the family. I hinted my suspicions to Margaretha; but she speedily convinced me that they were unfounded. *"The Lady Nisida is deaf and dumb,"* she said, *"and cannot possibly exercise such faculties of observation, nor adopt such means of obtaining information as would make her acquainted with all that has occurred between her father and yourself. Besides—she is constantly in attendance on her sire, who is very—very ill."* I now perceived the improbability of a deaf and dumb female discovering an amour so carefully concealed; but, to assure myself more fully on that head, I desired Margaretha to describe the Lady Nisida. This she readily did; and I learnt from her that the Count's daughter was of a beauty quite different from the lady whom I had seen in the church and in my own chamber. In a word it appears that Nisida has light hair, blue eyes, and a delicate form; whereas the object of my interest, curiosity, and fear, is a woman of dark Italian loveliness.

"I have little more now to say. The loss of the jewels and the recollection of the mysterious lady were soon absorbed in the distressing thoughts which the serious illness of the Count forced upon my mind. Weeks passed away, and he came not: but he sent repeated messages by Antonio, imploring me to console myself, as he should soon recover, and urging me not to take any step that might betray the existence of our amour. Need I say how religiously I obeyed him in this latter respect? Day after day did I hope to see him again, for I knew not that he was dying; and I used to dress myself in my gayest attire—even as now I am apparelled—to welcome his expected visit. Alas! he never came; and his death was concealed from me, doubtless that the sad event might not be communicated until after the funeral, lest in the first frenzy of anguish I should rush to the Riverola palace to imprint a last kiss upon the cheek of the corpse. But a few hours ago I learnt the whole truth from two female friends of Dame Margaretha who called to visit her, and whom I had hastened to inform that she was temporarily absent. My noble Andrea was dead, and at that very moment his funeral obsequies were being celebrated in the neighbouring church—the very church in which I had first beheld the mysterious lady! Frantic with grief—unmindful of the exposure that would ensue—reckless of consequences, I left the house—I hastened to the church—I intruded my presence amidst the mourners. You know the rest, Fernand. It only remains for me to say that the countenance which I beheld ere now at the window—strongly delineated and darkly conspicuous amidst the blaze of light outside the casement—was that of the lady whom I had thus seen for the third time! But, tell me, Fernand, how could a stranger thus obtain admittance to the gardens of your mansion?"

"You see yon lights, Agnes?" said Wagner, pointing towards the mansion which, as we stated at the commencement of this chapter, was situated at a distance of about two hundred yards from Fernand's dwelling, the backs of the two houses thus looking towards each other. "Those lights," he continued, "are shining in a mansion the gardens of which are separated from my own by a simple hedge of evergreen that would not bar even the passage of a child. Should any inmate of that mansion possess curiosity sufficient to induce him or her to cross the boundary, traverse my gardens, and approach the casements of my residence, that curiosity may be easily gratified."

"And to whom does yon mansion belong?" asked Agnes.

"To Dr. Duras, an eminent physician," was the reply.

"Dr. Duras, the physician who attended my noble Andrea in his illness!" exclaimed Agnes. "Then the mysterious lady of whom I have spoken so much, and whose countenance ere now appeared at the casement, must be an inmate of the house of Dr. Duras; or, at all events, a visitor there. Ah! surely there is some connexion between that lady and the family of Riverola?"

"Time will solve the mystery, dearest sister—for so I am henceforth to call you," said Fernand. "But, beneath this roof, no harm can menace you. And now let me summon good Dame Paula, my housekeeper, to con-

duct you to the apartments which have been prepared for your reception. The morning is far advanced, and we both stand in need of rest."

Dame Paula—an elderly, good-tempered—kind-hearted matron—shortly made her appearance: and to her charge did Wagner consign his newly-found relative, whom he now represented to be his sister.

But as Agnes accompanied the worthy woman from the apartment, she shuddered involuntarily as she passed the frame which was covered with the black cloth, and which seemed darkly ominous amidst the blaze of light that filled the room.

## CHAPTER X.

FRANCISCO, WAGNER, AND NISIDA.

ON the ensuing evening, Francisco, Count of Riverola, was seated in one of the splendid saloons of his palace, pondering upon the strange injunctions which he had received from his deceased father relative to the mysterious closet, when Wagner was announced.

Francisco rose to receive him, saying, in a cordial though melancholy tone, "Signor, I expected you."

"And let me hasten to express the regret which I experience at having addressed your lordship coldly and haughtily last night," exclaimed Wagner. "But—at the moment—I only beheld in you the son of him who had dishonoured a being very dear to my heart."

"I can well understand your feelings on that occasion, signor," replied Francisco. "Alas! the sins of the fathers are too often visited upon the children in this world. But in whatever direction our present conversation may turn, I implore you to spare as much as possible the memory of my sire."

"Think not, my lord," said Wagner, "that I should be so ungenerous as to reproach you for a deed in which you had no concern, and over which you exercised no control. Nor should I inflict so deep an injury upon you as to speak in disrespectful terms of him who was the author of your being, but who is now no more."

"Your kind language has already made me your friend," exclaimed Francisco. "And now point out to me in what manner I can in any way repair—or mitigate—the wrong done to that fair creature in whom you express yourself interested."

"That young lady is my sister," said Wagner, emphatically.

"Your sister, signor! And yet, meseems, she recognised you not—"

"Long years have passed since we saw each other," interrupted Fernand: "for we were separated in our childhood."

"And did you not both speak of some relative—an old man who once dwelt on the confines of the Black Forest of Germany, but who is now in Florence?" asked Francisco.

"Alas! that old man is no more," returned Wagner.

"I did but use his name to induce Agnes to place confidence in me, and allow me to withdraw her from a scene which her wild grief so unpleasantly interrupted; for I thought that were I then and there to announce myself as her brother, she might not believe me—she might suspect some treachery or snare in a city so notoriously profligate as Florence. But the subsequent explanations which took place between us cleared up all doubts on that subject."

"I am well pleased to hear that the poor girl has found so near a relative and so dear a friend, signor," said Francisco. "And now acquaint me, I pray thee, with the means whereby I may, to some extent, repair the injury your sister has sustained at the hands of him whose memory I implore you to spare!"

"Wealth I possess in abundance—oh! far greater abundance than is necessary to satisfy all my wants!" exclaimed Wagner, with something of bitterness and regret in his tone: "but, even were I poor, gold would not restore my sister's honour. No—let that subject, however, pass. I would only ask you, Count, whether there be any scion of your family—any lady connected with you—who answers this description?"

And Wagner proceeded to delineate, in minute terms, the portraiture of the mysterious lady who had inspired Agnes on three occasions with so much terror, and whom Agnes herself had depicted in such glowing language.

"Signor! you are describing the Lady Nisida, my sister!" ejaculated Francisco, struck with astonishment at the portrait thus verbally drawn.

"Your sister, my lord!" cried Wagner. "Then has



Dame Margaretha deceived Agnes in representing the Lady Nisida to be rather a beauty of the cold north than of the sunny south."

"Dame Margaretha!" said Francisco: "do you allude, signor, to the mother of my late father's confidential dependent, Antonio?"

"The same," was the answer. "It was at Dame Margaretha's house that your father placed my sister Agnes, who has resided there nearly four years."

"But wherefore have you made those inquiries relative to the Lady Nisida?" inquired Francisco.

"I will explain the motive with frankness," responded Wagner.

He then related to the young Count all those particulars relative to the mysterious lady and Agnes, with which the reader is already acquainted.

"There must be some extraordinary mistake—some strange error, signor, in all this," observed Francisco. "My poor sister is, as you seem to be aware, so deeply afflicted that she possesses not faculties calculated to make her aware of that amour which even I, who possess those faculties in which she is deficient, never suspected, and concerning which no hint ever reached me until the whole truth burst suddenly upon me last night at the funeral of my sire. Moreover, had accident revealed to Nisida the existence of that connexion between my father and your sister, signor, she would have imparted the discovery to me; such is the confidence and so great is the love that exists between us. For habit has rendered us so skilful and quick in conversing with the language of the deaf and dumb, that no impediment ever exists to the free interchange of our thoughts."

"And yet, if the Lady Nisida had made such a discovery, her hatred of Agnes may be well understood," said Wagner; "for her ladyship must naturally look upon my sister as the partner of her father's weakness—the dishonoured slave of his passions."

"Nisida has no secret from me," observed the young Count, firmly.

"But wherefore did Dame Margaretha deceive my sister in respect to the personal appearance of the Lady Nisida?" inquired Wagner.

"I know not. At the same time—"

The door opened, and Nisida entered.

She was attired in deep black: her luxuriant raven hair, no longer depending in shining curls, was gathered up in massy bands at the sides, and in a knot behind, whence hung a rich veil that meandered over her body's splendidly symmetrical length of limb in such a manner as to aid her attire in shaping rather than hiding the contours of that matchless form. The voluptuous development of her bust was shrouded, not concealed, by the stomacher of black velvet which she wore, and which set off in strong relief the dazzling whiteness of her neck.

The moment her lustrous dark eyes fell upon Fernand Wagner, she started slightly: but this movement was imperceptible alike to him whose presence caused it, and to her brother.

Francisco conveyed to her, by the rapid language of the fingers, the name of their visitor, and at the same time intimated to her that he was the brother of Agnes, —the young and lovely female whose strange appearance at the funeral, and avowed connexion with the late noble, had not been concealed from the haughty lady.

Nisida's eyes seemed to gleam with pleasure when she understood in what degree of relationship Wagner stood towards Agnes; and she bowed to him with a degree of courtesy seldom displayed by her to strangers.

Francisco then conveyed to her in the language of the dumb all those details already related in respect to the "mysterious lady" who had so haunted the unfortunate Agnes.

A glow of indignation mounted to the cheeks of Nisida; and more than usually rapid was the reply she made through the medium of the alphabet of the fingers.

"My sister desires me to express to you, signor," said Francisco, turning towards Wagner, "that she is not the person whom the Lady Agnes has to complain against. My sister," he continued, "has never, to her knowledge, seen Lady Agnes; much less has she ever penetrated into her chamber;—and indignantly does she repel the accusation relative to the abstraction of the jewels. She also desires me to inform you that last night, after the reading of our father's last testament, she retired to her chamber, which she did not quit until this morning at the usual hour; and that therefore it was not her countenance which the Lady Agnes beheld at the casement of your saloon."

"I pray you, my lord, to let the subject drop now, and for ever!" said Wagner, who was struck with profound admiration—almost amounting to love—for the Lady Nisida: "there is some strange mystery in all this, which time alone can clear up. Will your lordship express to your sister how grieved I am that any suspicion should have originated against her in respect to Agnes?"

Francisco signalled the remarks to Nisida; and the latter, rising from her seat, advanced towards Wagner, and presented him her hand in token of her readiness to forget the injurious imputations thrown out against her.

Fernand raised that fair hand to his lips, and respectfully kissed it; but the hand seemed to burn as he held it, and when he raised his eyes towards the lady's countenance, she darted on him a look so ardent and impassioned that it penetrated into his very soul.

That rapid interchange of glances seemed immediately to establish a kind of understanding—a species of intimacy between those extraordinary beings: for, on the one side, Nisida read in the fine eyes of the handsome Fernand all the admiration expressed there; and he, on his part, instinctively understood that he was far from disagreeable to the proud sister of the young Count of Riverola. While he was ready to fall at her feet and do homage to her beauty, she experienced the kindling of all the fierce passions of sensuality in her breast.

But the unsophisticated and innocent-minded Francisco observed not the expression of these emotions on either side, for their manifestation occupied not a moment. The interchange of such feelings is ever too vivid and electric to attract the notice of the unsuspecting observer.

When Wagner was about to retire, Nisida made the following signal to her brother:—"Express to the signor that he will ever be a welcome guest at the palace of Riverola; for we owe kindness and friendship to the brother of her whom our father dishonoured."

But, to the astonishment of both the Count and the Lady Nisida, Wagner raised his hands, and displayed as perfect a knowledge of the language of the dumb as they themselves possessed.

"I thank your ladyship for this unexpected condescension," he signalled by the rapid play of the fingers; "and I shall not fail to avail myself of this most courteous invitation."

It was impossible to describe the sudden glow of pleasure and delight which animated Nisida's splendid countenance, when she thus discovered that Wagner was able to hold converse with her; and she hastened to reply thus:—"We shall expect you to revisit us soon."

Wagner bowed low, and took his departure, his mind full of the beautiful Nisida.

## CHAPTER XI.

NISIDA AND WAGNER.—FRANCISCO AND FLORA.—THE APPROACH OF SUNSET.

UPWARDS of two months had passed away since the occurrences related in the preceding chapter, and it was now the 31st of January, 1521.

The sun was verging towards the western hemisphere; but the rapid flight of the hours was unnoticed by Nisida and Fernand Wagner, as they were seated together in one of the splendid saloons of the Riverola mansion.

Their looks were fixed upon each other's countenance—the eyes of Fernand expressing tenderness and admiration—those of Nisida beaming with all the passions of her ardent and sensual soul.

Suddenly the lady raised her hands, and by the rapid play of the fingers, asked—"Fernand, do you indeed love me as much as you would have me believe that I am beloved?"

"Never in this world was woman so loved as you," he replied, by the aid of the same language.

"And yet I am an unfortunate being—deprived of those qualities which give the greatest charm to the companionship of those who love."

"But you are eminently beautiful, my Nisida; and I can fancy how sweet—how rich toned would be your voice could your lips frame the words—'I love thee!'"

A profound sigh agitated the breast of the lady; and at the same time her lips quivered strangely—as if she were essaying to speak.

Wagner caught her to his breast: and she wept long and plentifully. Those tears relieved her—and she returned his warm, impassioned kisses with an ardour that convinced him how dear he had become to that

sticted, but transcendently bountiful being. On her face, the blood in her veins appeared to circulate like molten lead; and her face—her neck—her bosom were suffused with burning blushes.

At length, raising her head, she conveyed this wish to her companion:—"Thou hast given me an idea which may render me ridiculous in your estimation; but it is a whim—a fancy—a caprice engendered only by the profound affection I entertain for thee. I would that thou shouldst say, in thy softest—tenderest tones, the words—'I love thee'—and by the wrathing of thy lips I shall perceive enough to enable my imagination to persuade itself that those words have really fallen upon my ears!"

Fernand smiled assent; and while Nisida's eyes were fixed upon him with the most enthusiastic interest, he said, "I love thee!"

The sovereign beauty of her countenance was suddenly lighted up with an expression of ineffable joy—of indescribable delight; and signalling the assurance—"I do love thee, dearest, dearest Fernand,"—she threw herself into his arms.

But almost at the same moment voices were heard in the adjacent room; and Wagner, gently disengaging himself from Nisida's embrace, hastily conveyed to her the intimation of the vicinity of others.

The lady gave him to understand by a glance that she comprehended him; and they remained motionless, gazing fondly upon each other.

"I know not how it has occurred, Flora," said the voice of Francisco, speaking in a tender tone, in the adjoining room—"I know not how it has occurred that I should have addressed you in this manner—so soon, too, after the death of my lamented father, and while these mourning garments yet denote the loss which myself and sister have sustained."

"Oh, my lord, suffer me to retire," exclaimed Flora Francatelli, in a tone of beseeching earnestness: "I should not have listened to your lordship so long in the Gallery of Pictures—much less have accompanied your lordship hither!"

"I requested thee to come with me to this apartment, Flora, that I might declare—without fear of our interview being interrupted—how dear, how very dear thou art to me, and how honourable is the passion with which thou hast inspired me. O Flora," exclaimed the young Count, "I could no longer conceal my love for thee! My heart was bursting to reveal its secret; and when I discovered thee alone ere now in the Gallery of Pictures, I could not resist the favourable opportunity which accident seemed to have afforded for this avowal."

"Alas! my lord," murmured Flora, "I know not whether to rejoice or to be sorrowful at the revelation which has this day met my ears."

"And yet you said ere now that you could love me—that you did love me, in return!" ejaculated Francisco.

"I spoke truly, my lord," answered the bashful maiden: "but, alas! how can the humble, obscure, portionless Flora become the wife of the rich, powerful, and renowned Count of Riverola? There is an inseparable gulf fixed between us, my lord!"

"Am I not my own master? Can I not consult my happiness in that most solemn and serious of this world's duties—marriage?" cried Francisco, with all the generous ardour of youth and of his own noble disposition.

"Your lordship is free and independent in point of fact," said Flora, in a low, tender, and yet impressive tone; "but your lordship has relations—friends—"

"My relations will not thwart the wishes of him whom they love," answered Francisco: "and those who place obstacles in the way of my felicity cannot be denominated my friends."

"Oh! my lord—could I yield myself up to the hopes which your language inspires!" cried Flora.

"You can—you may, dearest girl!" exclaimed the young Count. "And not—I know that you love me! But many months must elapse ere I can call thee mine; and, indeed, a remorse smites my heart that I have dared to think of my own happiness, so soon after the mournful ceremony which consigned a parent to the tomb! Heaven knows that I do not the less deplore his loss—But therefore art thou so pale—so trembling, Flora?"

"Meseems that a superstitious awe, as if of evil omens, has seized upon my soul," returned the maiden, in a tremulous tone. "Let us retire, my lord: the Lady Nisida may require my services elsewhere."

"Nisida!" repeated Francisco, as if the mention of his sister's name had suddenly awakened new ideas in his mind.

"Ah! my lord," said Flora, sorrowfully, "you now perceive that there is at least one relative who may not learn with satisfaction the alliance which your lordship would form with the poor and humble dependant!"

"Nay, by my patron saint, thou hast misunderstood me!" exclaimed the young Count, warmly. "Nisida will not oppose her brother's happiness; and her strong mind will know how to despise these conventional usages which require that high birth should mate with high birth, and wealth ally itself to wealth. Yes—Nisida will consult my felicity alone; and when I ere now repeated her name as it fell from your lips, it was in a manner reproachful to myself, because I have retained my love for thee a secret from her. A secret from Nisida—oh! I have been cruel, unjust, not to have confided in my sister long ago! And yet," he added, more slowly, "she might reproach me for my selfishness in bestowing a thought on marriage so soon—so very soon after a funeral! Flora, dearest maiden—circumstances demand that the avowal which accident and opportunity have this day led me to make, should exist as a secret known only unto yourself and me. But, in a few months, I will explain all to my sister, and she will greet thee as her brother's chosen bride. Art thou content, Flora, that our mutual love should remain thus concealed until the proper time shall come for its revelation?"

"Yes, my lord—and for many reasons," was the reply.

"For many reasons, Flora?" exclaimed the young Count.

"At least for more than one," rejoined the maiden. "In the first instance, it is expedient that your lordship should have due leisure to reflect upon the important step which you propose to take—a step conferring so much honour upon myself, but which may not insure your happiness."

"If this be a specimen of thy reasons, dear maiden," exclaimed Francisco, laughing, "I need hear no more. Be well assured," he added seriously, "that time will not impair the love I experience for you."

Flora murmured a reply which did not reach Wagner; and immediately afterwards the sound of her light steps were heard retreating from the adjacent room. A profound silence of a few minutes occurred: and then Francisco also withdrew.

Wagner had been an unwilling listener to the preceding conversation; but while it was in progress, he from time to time threw looks of love and tenderness on his beautiful companion, who returned them with impassioned ardour.

Whether it were that her irritable temper was impatient of the restraint imposed upon herself and her lover by the vicinity of others—or whether she was annoyed at the fact of her brother and Flora being so long together—for Wagner had intimated to her who their neighbours were the moment he had recognised their voices—we cannot say: but Nisida showed an occasional uneasiness of manner, which she, however, studied to subdue as much as possible, during the scene that took place in the adjoining apartment.

Fernand did not offer to convey to her any idea of the nature of the conversation which occupied her brother and Flora Francatelli; neither did she manifest the least curiosity to be enlightened on that head.

The moment the young lovers had quitted the next room, Wagner intimated the fact to Nisida; but at the same instant, just as she was bestowing upon him a tender caress—a dreadful—an appalling reminiscence burst upon him with such overwhelming force, that he fell back stupefied on the sofa.

Nisida's countenance instantly assumed an expression of the deepest solicitude; and her eloquent—speaking eyes, implored him to tell her what had assailed him.

But, starting wildly from his seat, and casting on her a glance of such bitter—bitter anguish, that the appalling emotions thus expressed struck terror to her soul—Fernand rushed from the room.

Nisida sprang to the window; and, though the obscurity of evening now announced the last flickerings of the setting sunbeams in the west, she could perceive her lover dashing furiously on through the spacious gardens that surrounded the Riverola palace.

On—he went towards the River Arno; and in a few moments he was out of sight.

Alas! intoxicated with love, and giving himself wholly up to the one delightful idea—that he was with the beautiful Nisida—then, absorbed in the interest of the discourse which he had overheard between Francisco and Flora—Wagner had forgotten until it was nearly too late

that the sun was about to set on the last day of the month!

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE WEHR-WOLF.

'Twas the hour of sunset.

The eastern horizon, with its gloomy and sombre twilight, offered a strange contrast to the glorious glowing hues of vermillion, and purple, and gold, that blended in long streaks athwart the western sky.

For even the winter sunset of Italy is accompanied with resplendent tints—as if an Emperor, drenched with a refulgent diadem, were repairing to his imperial couch.

The declining rays of the orb of light bathed in molten gold the pinnacles, steeples, and lofty palaces of proud Florence, and toyed with the limpid waves of the Arno, on whose banks innumerable villas and casinos already sent forth delicious strains of music, broken only by the mirth of joyous revellers.

And by degrees, as the sun went down, the palaces of the superb city began to shed light from their lattices set in richly sculptured masonry; and here and there where festivity prevailed, grand illuminations sprang up with magical quickness—the reflection from each separate galaxy rendering it bright as day,—far—far around.

Vocal and instrumental melody floated through the still air, and the perfume of exotics, decorating the halls of the Florentine nobles, poured from the widely opened portals, and rendered that air delicious.

For Florence was gay that evening—the last day of each month being the one which the wealthy lords and high-born ladies set apart for the reception of their friends.

The sun sank behind the western hills; and even the hot-house flowers closed up their buds—as if they were eye-lids weighed down by slumber, and not to awake again until the morning should arouse them again to welcome the return of their lover—that glorious sun!

Darkness seemed to dilate upon the sky like an image in the midst of a mirage, expanding into superhuman dimensions,—then rapidly losing its shapeliness, and covering the vault above densely and confusedly.

But by degrees countless stars began to stud the colourless canopy of heaven, like gems of orient splendour; for the last—last flickering ray of the twilight in the west had expired in the increasing obscurity.

But, hark! what is that wild and fearful cry?

In the midst of a wood of evergreens on the banks of the Arno, a man—young, handsome, and splendidly attired—has thrown himself upon the ground, where he writhes like a stricken serpent.

He is the prey of a demoniac excitement: an appalling consternation is on him;—madness is in his brain—his mind is on fire.

Lightnings appear to gleam from his eyes—as if his soul were dismayed, and withering within his breast.

"Oh! no—no!" he cries, with a piercing shriek, as if writhing madly—furiously—but vainly, against some unseen fiend that holds him in his grasp.

And the wood echoes to that terrible wail: and the startled bird flies fluttering from its bough.

But, lo! what awful change is taking place in the form of that doomed being? His handsome countenance elongates into one of savage and brute-like shape—the rich garment which he wears becomes a rough, shaggy, and wiry skin;—his body loses its human contour—his arms and limbs take another form; and, with a frantic howl of misery, to which the woods give horribly faithful reverberations, and with a rush like a hurrying wind, the wretch starts wildly away—no longer a man, but a monstrous wolf!

On—he goes: the wood is cleared—the open country is gained. Tree—hedge—and isolated cottage appear but dim points in the landscape—a moment seen, the next left behind: the very hills appear to leap after each other.

A cemetery stands in the monster's way; but he turns not aside—through the sacred enclosure, on—he goes. There are situate many tombs, stretching up the slope of a gentle acclivity, from the dark soil of which the white monuments stand forth with white and ghastly gleaming; and on the summit of the hill is the church of St. Benedict the Blessed.

From the summit of the ivy-grown tower the very rocks, in the midst of their cawing, are scared away by the furious rush and the wild howl, with which the Wehr-Wolf thunders over the hallowed ground.

At the same instant a train of monks appear round the angle of the church—for there is a funeral at that hour; and their torches, flaring with the breeze that is now springing up, cast an awful and almost magical light upon the dark grey walls of the edifice,—the strange effect being enhanced by the prismatic reflection of the lurid blaze from the stained glass of the oriel window.

The solemn spectacle seemed to madden the Wehr-Wolf. His speed increased—he dashed through the funeral train—appalling cries of terror and alarm burst from the lips of the holy fathers, and the solemn procession was thrown into confusion. The coffin-bearers dropped their burden—and the corpse rolled out upon the ground—its decomposing countenance seeming horrible by the glare of the torchlight.

The monk who walked nearest the head of the coffin was thrown down by the violence with which the ferocious monster cleared its passage; and the venerable father—on whose brow sat the snow of eighty winters—fell with his head against a monument, and his brains were dashed out.

On—he fled the Wehr-Wolf—over mead and hill, through valley and dale. The very wind seemed to make way: he clove the air—he appeared to skim the ground to fly.

Through the romantic glades and rural scenes of Etruria the monster sped—sounds resembling shrieking howls, bursting ever and anon from his foaming mouth—his red eyes glaring in the dusk of the evening like ominous meteors—and his whole aspect so full of appalling ferocity, that never was seen so monstrous—so terrific a spectacle!

A village is gained—he turns not aside—but dashes madly through the little street formed by the huts and cottages of the Tuscan vine-dressers.

A little child is in his path—a sweet, blooming, ruddy, noble boy, with violet-coloured eyes and flaxen hair,—disporting merrily at a short distance from his parents who are seated at the threshold of their dwelling.

Suddenly a strange and ominous rush—an unknown trampling of rapid feet falls upon their ears: then with a savage cry, the monster sweeps past.

"My child! my child!" screams the affrighted mother; and simultaneously the shrill cry of an infant in the sudden agony of death carries desolation to the ear!

'Tis done—'twas but the work of a moment: the wolf has swept by—the quick rustling of his feet is no longer heard in the village. But those sounds are succeeded by awful wails and heartrending lamentations; for the child—the blooming, violet-eyed, flaxen-haired boy—the darling of his poor but tender parents, is weltering in his blood!

On—he speeds the destroyer, urged by an infernal influence which maddens the more intensely because its victim strives vainly to struggle against it;—on—he, over the beaten road—over the fallow field—over the cottager's garden—over the grounds of the rich one's rural villa.

And now, to add to the horror of the scene, a pack of dogs have started in pursuit of the wolf,—dashing,—crashing,—hurrying,—pushing,—pressing upon one another in all the anxious ardour of the chase.

The silence and shade of the open country, in the mild starlight, seem eloquently to proclaim the peace and happiness of a rural life;—but now that silence is broken by the mingled howling of the wolf and the deep baying of the hounds,—and that shade is crossed and darkened by the forms of the animals as they scour so fleetly—oh! with such whirlwind speed along!

But that Wehr-Wolf bears a charmed life;—for though the hounds overtake him—fall upon him—and attack him with all the courage of their nature,—yet does he hurl them from him—toss them aside—spurn them away—and at length free himself from their pursuit altogether!

And now the moon rises with unclouded splendour, like a maiden looking from her lattice screened with purple curtains; and still the monster hurries madly on with unrelaxing speed.

For hours he has pursued his way thus madly;—and, on a sudden, as he passes the outskirts of a sleeping town, the church bell is struck by the watcher's hand, to proclaim midnight.

Over the town—over the neighboring fields—through the far-off forest, clanged that iron tongue; and the Wehr-Wolf sped all the faster—as if he were with ominous flapping, like the wings of the fabulous Simoorgh.

But, in the midst of appalling spasmodic convulsions,

—with direful writhings on the soil, and with cries of bitter anguish,—the Wehr-Wolf gradually threw off his monster shape; and at the very moment when the first sunbeam penetrated the wood and glinted on his face, he rose a handsome—young—and perfect man once more!

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### NISIDA'S EMOTIONS.—THE DISGUISE.—A PLOT.

We must now return to Nisida, whom we left gazing from the window of the Riverola mansion, at the moment when Wagner rushed away from the vicinity of his lady-love on the approach of sunset.

The singularity of his conduct—the look of ineffable horror and anguish which he cast upon her ere he darted from her presence—and the abruptness of his departure, filled her mind with the most torturing misgivings, and with a thousand wild fears.

Had his senses suddenly left him? was he the prey to fits of mental aberration which would produce so extraordinary an effect upon him? had he taken a sudden loathing and disgust to herself? or had he discovered anything in respect to her which had converted his love into hatred!

She knew not—and conjecture was vain!

To a woman of her excitable temperament the occurrence was particularly painful. She had never known the passion of love until she had seen Wagner: and the moment she did see him, she loved him. The sentiment on her part originated altogether in the natural sensuality of her disposition: there was nothing pure—nothing holy—nothing refined in her affection for him;—it was his wonderful personal beauty that had made so immediate and so profound an impression upon her heart.

There was consequently something furious and raging in that passion which she experienced for Fernand Wagner,—a passion capable of every extreme—the largest sacrifices, or infuriate jealousies—the most implicit confidence, or the maddest suspicion! It was a passion which would induce her to ascend the scaffold to save him; or to plunge the vengeful dagger into his heart did she fancy that he deceived her!

To one, then, whose soul was animated by such a love, the conduct of Fernand was adapted to wear even an exaggerated appearance of singularity; and as each different conjecture swept through her imagination, her emotions were excited to an extent which caused her countenance to vary its expression a hundred times in a minute.

The fury of the desolating torrent—the rage of the terrific volcano—the sky cradled in the blackest clouds—the ocean heaving tempestuously in its mighty bed—the chafing of a tremendous flood against an embankment which seems ready every moment to give way and allow the collected waters to burst forth upon the broad plains and into the peaceful valleys,—all these occurrences in the physical world were imaged by the emotions that now agitated within the breast of the Italian lady.

Her mind was like a sea put in motion by the wind:—and her eyes flashed fire—her lip quivered—her bosom heaved convulsively—her neck arched proudly, as if she were struggling against ideas that forced themselves upon her and painfully wounded her boundless patrician pride.

For the thought that rose uppermost amidst all the conjectures which rushed to her imagination, was that Fernand had suddenly conceived an invincible dislike towards her.

Wherefore did he fly thus—as if eager to place the greatest possible distance between herself and him?

Then did she recall to mind every interchange of thought that had passed between them through the language of the fingers; and she could fix upon nothing which, emanating from herself, had given him offence?

Had he then really lost his senses?

Madly did he seem to be rushing towards the Arno, on whose dark tide the departing rays of the setting sun glinted with oscillating and dying power.

She still continued to gaze from the window, long after he had disappeared; obscurity was gathering rapidly around—but, even had it been noon-day, she would now have seen nothing. Her ideas grew bewildered: mortification—grief—anger—suspicion—burning desire, all mingled together, and at length produced a

species of stunning effect upon her—so that the past appeared to be a dream and the future was wrapt in the darkest gloom and uncertainty.

This strange condition of her mind did not however last long: the natural energy of her character speedily asserted its empire over that intellectual lethargy which had seized upon her;—and, awaking from her stupor, she resolved to waste not another instant in useless conjectures as to the cause of her lover's conduct.

Hastening to her own apartments, she dismissed Flora Francastelli, whom she found there, with an abruptness of gesture and a frowning expression of countenance amounting to an act of cruelty towards that resigned and charming girl; so that as the latter hastened from the room, tears started from her eyes, and she murmured to herself, "Can it be possible that Donna Nisida suspects the attachment her brother has formed towards me? Oh! if she do, the star of an evil destiny seems already to rule my horoscope!"

Scarcely had Flora disappeared in this sorrowing manner, when Nisida secured the outer door of her own suite of apartments, and hurried to her bed-chamber. There she threw aside the garb belonging to her sex, and assumed that of a cavalier, which she took from a press opening with a secret spring. Then, having arranged her hair beneath a velvet toque shaded with waving black plumes, in such a manner that the disguise was as complete as she could render it, she girt on a long rapier of finest Milan steel; and, throwing the short cloak, edged with costly fur, gracefully over her left shoulder, she quitted her chamber by a private door opening behind the folds of the bed curtains.

A narrow and dark staircase admitted her into the gardens of the Riverola mansion. These she crossed with a step so light and free, that had it been possible to observe her in the darkness of the evening, she would have been taken for the most elegant and charming cavalier that ever honoured the Florentine Republic with his presence.

In about a quarter of an hour she reached the abode of Dr. Duras; but, instead of entering it, she passed round one of its angles, and opening a wicket by means of a key which she had about her, gained access to the gardens in the rear of the mansion.

She traversed these grounds with hasty steps, passed the boundary which separated them from the gardens of Wagner's dwelling, and then relaxing her pace, advanced with more caution to the windows of that very apartment where Agnes had been so alarmed two months previously, by observing the countenance at the casement.

But all was now dark within: Wagner was not in his favourite room—for Nisida knew that this was her lover's favourite apartment.

Perhaps he had not yet returned?

Thus thought the lady; and she walked slowly round the spacious dwelling, which like the generality of the patrician mansions of Florence in those times—as indeed is now the case to a considerable extent—stood in the midst of extensive gardens.

There were lights in the servants' offices; but every other room seemed dark. No:—one window in the front, on the ground-floor, shone with the lustre of a lamp.

Nisida approached it, and beheld Agnes reclining in a pensive manner on a sofa in a small but elegantly furnished apartment. Her countenance was immediately overclouded, and for an instant she lingered to gaze upon the sybil-like form that was stretched upon that ottoman. Then she hastily pursued her way; and having perfected the round of the building, once more reached the windows of her lover's favourite room.

Convinced that he had not returned, and fearful of being observed by any of the domestics who might happen to pass through the gardens, Nisida retraced her way towards the dwelling of Dr. Duras. But her heart was now heavy; for she knew not how to act.

Her original object was to obtain an interview with Wagner that very night, and learn, if possible, the reason of his extraordinary conduct towards her; for the idea of remaining in suspense for many long—long hours was painful in the extreme to a woman of her excitable nature.

She was however compelled to resign herself to this latter alternative; and having let herself through the wicket belonging to the physician's gardens, she directed her steps homeward.

On her way she passed by the gate of the Convent of Carmelite Nuns—one of the wealthiest, most strictly

disciplined, and celebrated monastic establishments in the Florentine Republic.

It appeared that a sudden thought here struck her; for ascending the steps leading to the gate, she paused beneath the lamp of the deep Gothic portico, took out her tablets, and hastily wrote the following words:—

"Donna Nisida of Riverola requests an interview with the Lady Abbess Maria to-morrow at mid-day, on a matter seriously regarding the spiritual welfare of a young female who has shown great and signal disregard for the rites and ordinances of the most Holy Catholic

her. Fearful that they might be domestics belonging to the household she hastily and noiselessly retreated within the deep shade of the wall of the mansion; and there she remained motionless.

We must now detail the conversation which was passing between the two individuals whose presence in the garden had thus alarmed the Lady Nisida.

"But are you sure of what you say, Antonio?" demanded one of the men.

"By Saint Jacopo! I cannot be mistaken," was the reply. "The closet has been locked up for years and years—and the old Count always used to keep the key

"FERNAND RAISED THAT FAIR HAND TO HIS LIPS." (See p. 21.)

Church; and in respect to whom the most severe measures must be adopted. Donna Nisida will visit the holy Mother to-morrow at mid-day."

Having written these words, Nisida tore off the leaf and thrust it through a small square grating set in the massive door of the convent. Then ringing the bell to call attention to the gate, she hastily pursued her way homeward.

She had gained the gardens of the Riverola mansion, and was advancing towards the door of the private staircase leading to her chamber, when she suddenly perceived two dark figures standing within a few yards of

in an iron chest, which was also carefully locked and chained round. What can the place possibly contain but a treasure?"

"After all, it is only conjecture on your part; and, that being the case, it is not worth while to risk one's life—"

"You are a coward, Stephano!" exclaimed Antonio, angrily. "The closet has got a heavy—massive door, and a prodigiously strong lock; and if those precautions were not adopted to protect a hoard of wealth, why were they taken at all, let me ask you?"

"There is something in what you say," replied Stephano: "but you do wrong to call me a coward. If



it were not that we are cousins and linked by a bond of long-maintained friendship, I would send my rapier through your doublet in a twinkling."

"Nay—I did not mean to anger thee, Stephano," cried the valet. "But let us speak lower: chafe not, I pray thee!"

"Well—well," said the other, gloomily, "go on, in the name of your patron saint! Only keep a guard over your tongue, for it wags somewhat too freely; and remember that a man who has been for fifteen years the captain of as gallant a band as ever levied contributions on the lieges of the Republic, is not to have 'coward' thrown in his teeth."

"Let it pass, good Stephano!" urged the valet. "I tell thee that the closet whereof I have spoken, can contain naught save a treasure—perhaps in gold—perhaps in massive plate."

"We can dispose of either to our advantage," observed the bandit, with a hoarse chuckle.

"Will you undertake the business?" demanded Antonio.

"I will," was the resolute answer; "and as much to convince you that Stephano is not a coward, as for any other reason. But when is it to be done? and why did you make an appointment to meet me here, of all places in Florence?"

"It can be done when you choose," replied Antonio; "and, as for the other question, I desired you to meet me here, because I knew that you would not refuse a fine chance; and suspecting this much, it was necessary to show you the geography of the place."

"Good!" observed the robber-chief. "To-morrow night I have a little affair in hand for a reverend and holy father, who is sure to be chosen Superior of his Order if his rival in the candidature be removed; and in four-and-twenty hours the said rival must be food for the fishes of the Arno."

"Then the night after that?" suggested Antonio.

"Pre-engaged again," returned the bandit-captain, coolly. "A wealthy Countess has been compelled to pledge her diamonds to a Jew: on Sunday next she must appear with her husband at the Palace of the Medici; and on Saturday night, therefore, the diamonds must be recovered from the Jew."

"Then the husband knows not that they are so pledged?" said Antonio.

"Scarcely," answered the brigand. "They were deposited with the Jew for a loan which the Countess raised to accommodate her lover. Now do you understand?"

"Perfectly. What say you to next Monday night?"

"I am at your service," responded Stephano. "Monday will suit me admirably—and midnight shall be the hour. And now instruct me in the nature of the locality."

"Come with me, and I will show you by which window you and your comrades must effect an entry," said Antonio.

The valet and the robber-chief now moved away from the spot where they had stood to hold the above conversation; and the moment they had turned the adjacent angle of the mansion, Nisida hastened to regain her apartment by the private staircase—resolving, however, to see Wagner as early as possible in the morning.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE LAST MEETING OF AGNES AND THE STRANGER—LADY.

WHILE all Nature was wrapt in the listening stillness of admiration at the rising sun, Fernand Wagner dragged himself painfully along toward his home.

His garments were besmeared with mud and dirt: they were torn, too, in many places; and here and there were stains of blood, still wet, upon them.

In fact, had he been dragged by a wild horse through a thicket of brambles, he could scarcely have appeared in a more wretched plight.

His countenance was ghastly pale—terror still flashed from his eyes—and despair sat on his lofty brow.

Stealing through the most concealed part of his garden, he was approaching his own mansion with the air of a man who returns home in the morning after having perpetrated some dreadful deed of turpitude under cover of the night.

But the watchful eyes of a woman have marked his coming from the lattice of her window; and in a few minutes Agnes, light as a fawn, came bounding towards

him, exclaiming, "Oh! what a night of uneasiness have I passed, Fernand! But at length thou art restored to me—thou, whom I have ever loved so fondly; although," she added, mournfully, "I abandoned thee for so long a time!"

And she embraced him tenderly.

"Agnes!" cried Fernand, repulsing her with an impatience which she had never experienced at his hands before: "wherefore thus act the spy upon me? Believe me, that although we pass ourselves off as brother and sister, yet I do not renounce that authority which the real nature of those ties that bind us together—"

"Fernand! Fernand! this to me!" exclaimed Agnes, bursting into tears. "Oh! how have I deserved such reproaches?"

"My dearest girl—pardon me—forgive me!" cried Wagner, in a tone of bitter anguish. "My God! I ought not to upbraid thee for that watchfulness during my absence, and that joy at my return, which prove that you love me! Again I say, pardon me, dearest Agnes."

"You need not ask me, Fernand," was the reply. "Only speak kindly to me—"

"I do—I will, Agnes," interrupted Wagner. "But leave me now! Let me regain my own chamber alone:—I have reasons—urgent reasons for so doing;—and this afternoon, Agnes, I shall be composed—collected again. Do you proceed by that path—I will take this."

And, hastily pressing her hand, Wagner broke abruptly away.

For a few moments Agnes stood looking after him in vacant astonishment at his extraordinary manner, and also at his alarming appearance, but concerning which latter she had not dared to question him.

When he had entered the mansion by a private door, Agnes turned and pursued her way along a circuitous path shaded on each side by dark evergreens, and which was the one he had directed her to take so as to regain the front gate of the dwelling.

But scarcely had she advanced a dozen paces, when a sudden rustling amidst the trees alarmed her; and in another instant a female form—tall, majestic, and with a dark veil thrown over her head—stood before her.

Agnes uttered a faint shriek; for—although the lady's countenance was concealed by the veil—she had no difficulty in recognising the stranger who had already terrified her on three previous occasions, and who seemed to haunt her.

And, as if to dispel all doubt as to the identity, the majestic lady suddenly tore aside her veil, and disclosed to the trembling, shrieking Agnes, features already too well known.

But, if the lightnings of those brilliant, burning, black eyes had seemed terrible on former occasions, they were now absolutely blasting; and Agnes fell upon her knees, exclaiming, "Mercy! mercy! how have I offended you?"

For a few moments those basilisk-eyes darted forth shafts of fire and flame—and the red lips quivered violently—and the haughty brow contracted menacingly; and Agnes was stupefied—stunned—fascinated,—terribly fascinated by that tremendous rage, the vengeance of which seemed ready to explode against her.

But only a few moments lasted that dreadful scene;—for the lady, whose entire appearance was that of an avenging fiend in the guise of a beauteous woman, suddenly drew a sharp poniard from its sheath in her bodice, and plunged it into the bosom of the hapless Agnes.

The victim fell back; but not a shriek—not a sound escaped her lips. The blow was well aimed—the poniard was sharp and went deep—and death followed instantaneously.

For nearly a minute did the murderess stand gazing on the corpse—the corpse of one erst so beautiful: and her countenance, gradually relaxing from its stern, implacable expression, assumed an air of deep remorse—of bitter, bitter compunction.

But—probably yielding to the sudden thought that she must provide for her own safety—the murderess drew forth the dagger from the white bosom in which it was buried—hastily wiped it upon a leaf—returned it to the sheath—and replacing the veil over her countenance, hurried rapidly away from the scene of her fearful crime.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE SPIRIT.—THE ARREST.

SCARCELY ten minutes had elapsed since the unfortunate Agnes was thus suddenly cut off in the bloom of youth

and beauty, when a lieutenant of police, with his guard of sbirri, passed along the road skirting Wagner's garden.

They were evidently in search of some malefactor; for stopping in their course, they began to deliberate on the business which they had in hand.

"Which way could he possibly have gone?" cried one, striking the butt-end of his pike heavily upon the ground.

"How could we possibly have missed him?" exclaimed another.

"Stephano is not so easily caught, my men," observed the lieutenant. "He is the most astute and cunning of the band of which he is the captain. And yet I wish we had pounced upon him, since we were so nicely on his track."

"And a thousand ducats offered by the State for his capture," suggested one of the sbirri.

"Yes—'tis annoying!" ejaculated the lieutenant: "but I could have sworn he passed this way."

"And I would bear the same evidence, signor," observed the first speaker. "May be he has taken refuge in those bushes."

"Not unlikely. We are fools to grant him a moment's vantage-ground. Over the fence, my men—and beat amongst those gardens."

Thus speaking, the lieutenant set the example by leaping the railing, and entering the grounds belonging to Wagner's abode.

The sbirri, who were six in number, including their officer, divided themselves into two parties, and proceeded to search the gardens.

Suddenly a loud cry of horror burst from one of the sections; and when the other hastened to the spot, the sbirri composing it found their comrades in the act of raising the corpse of Agnes.

"She is quite dead," said the lieutenant, placing his hand upon her heart. "And yet the crime cannot have been committed many minutes—as the corpse is scarcely cold, and the blood still oozes forth."

"What a lovely creature she must have been!" exclaimed one of the sbirri.

"Cease your profane remarks, my man," cried the lieutenant. "This must be examined into directly. Does any one know who dwells in that mansion?"

"Signor Wagner, a wealthy German," was the reply given by a sbirri.

"Then come with me, my man," said the lieutenant; "and let us lose no time in searching his house. One of you must remain here by the corpse—and the rest may continue their search after the bandit, Stephano."

Having issued these orders, the lieutenant, followed by the sbirri whom he had selected to accompany him, hastened to the mansion.

The gate was opened by an old porter, who stared in astonishment when he beheld the functionaries of justice visiting that peaceful dwelling. But the lieutenant ordered him to close and lock the gate; and having secured the key, the officer said, "We must search this house: a crime has been committed close at hand."

"A crime!" ejaculated the porter: "then the culprit is not here—for there is not a soul beneath this roof who would perpetrate a misdeed."

"Cease your prating, old man!" said the lieutenant, sternly. "We have a duty to perform—see that we be not molested in executing it."

"But what is the crime, signor, of which—"

"Nay—that you shall know anon," interrupted the lieutenant. "In the name of his Serene Highness, the Duke, I command you in the first place to lead me and my follower to the presence of your master."

The old man hastened to obey this mandate; and he conducted the sbirri into the chamber where Wagner, having thrown off his garments, was partaking of that rest which he so much needed.

At the sound of heavy feet and the clanking of martial weapons, Fernand started from the slumber into which he had fallen only a few minutes previously.

"What means this insolent intrusion?" he exclaimed, his cheeks flushing with anger at the presence of the police.

"Pardon us, signor," said the lieutenant, in a respectful tone; "but a dreadful crime has been committed close by—indeed, within the enclosure of your own grounds—"

"A dreadful crime!" ejaculated Wagner.

"Yes, signor—a crime—"

The officer was interrupted by an ejaculation of surprise which burst from the lips of his attendant sbirri;

and turning hastily round, he beheld his follower intently scrutinizing the attire which Fernand had ere now thrown off.

"Ah! blood-stains!" cried the lieutenant, whose attention was directed towards those marks by the finger of his man. "Then is the guilty one speedily discovered! Signor," he added, turning once more towards Wagner, "are those your garments?"

An expression of indescribable horror convulsed the countenance of Fernand; for the question of the officer naturally reminded him of his dreadful fate—the fate of a Wehr-Wolf,—although, we should observe, he never remembered, when restored to the form of a man, what he might have done during the long hours that he wore the shape of a ferocious monster.

Still, as he knew that his garments had been soiled—torn—and blood-stained in the course of the preceding night, it was no wonder that he shuddered and became convulsed with mental agony when his terrible doom was so forcibly recalled to his mind.

His emotions were naturally considered to be corroborative evidence of guilt; and the lieutenant, laying his hand upon Wagner's shoulder, said in a stern, solemn manner, "In the name of his Highness, our Prince, I arrest you for the crime of murder!"

"Murder!" repeated Fernand, dashing away the officer's arm; "you dare not accuse me of such a deed!" "I accuse you of murder, signor," exclaimed the lieutenant. "Within a hundred paces of your dwelling, a young lady—"

"A young lady!" cried Wagner, thinking of Agnes whom he had left in the garden.

"Yes, signor—a young lady has been most barbarously murdered!" added the officer in an impressive tone.

"Agnes! Agnes!" almost screamed the unhappy man, as this dreadful announcement fell upon his ears. "Oh! is it possible that thou art no more, my poor Agnes?"

He covered his face with his hands, and wept bitterly. The lieutenant made a sign to his follower, who instantly quitted the room.

"There must be some mistake in this, signor," said the old porter, approaching the lieutenant, and speaking in a voice tremulous with emotions. "The master whom I serve, and whom you accuse, is incapable of the deed imputed to him."

"Yes—God knows how truly you speak!" ejaculated Wagner, raising his head. "That girl—Oh, sooner than have harmed one single hair of her head—But how know you that it is Agnes who is murdered?" he cried, abruptly turning towards the lieutenant.

"It was you who said it, signor," calmly replied the officer, as he fixed his dark eyes keenly upon Fernand.

"Oh! it was a surmise—a conjecture—because I parted with Agnes a short time ago in the garden—"

exclaimed Wagner, speaking in hurried and broken sentences.

"Behold the victim!" said the lieutenant, who had approached the window, from which he was now looking.

Wagner sprang from his couch, and glanced forth into the garden beneath.

The sbirri were advancing along the gravel pathway, bearing amongst them the corpse of Agnes, upon whose pallid countenance the morning sunbeams were dancing as if in mockery even at death.

"Holy Virgin! it is indeed Agnes!" cried Wagner, in a tone of the most profound—heartrending anguish, and he fell back senseless in the arms of the lieutenant.

An hour afterwards, Fernand Wagner was the inmate of a dungeon beneath the palace inhabited by the Duke of Florence.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### NISIDA AND THE CARMELITE ABBESS.

PUNCTUALLY at mid-day, the Lady Nisida of Riverola proceeded, alone and unattended, to the Convent of Carmelite Nuns, where she was immediately admitted into the presence of the Abbess.

The superior of this monastic establishment was a tall, thin, stern-looking woman, with a sallow complexion, an imperious compression of the lips, and small grey eyes that seemed to flicker with malignity rather than to beam with the pure light of Christian love.

She was noted for the austerity of her manners, the rigid discipline which she maintained in the convent, and the inexorable disposition which she showed towards those who, having committed a fault, came within her jurisdiction.

Rumour was often busy with the affairs of the Carmelite Convent: and the grandams and gossips of Florence would huddle together around their domestic hearths, on the cold winter evenings, and venture mysterious hints and whispers of strange deeds committed within the walls of that sacred institution,—how from time to time some young and beautiful nun had suddenly disappeared, to the surprise and alarm of her companions,—how piercing shrieks had been heard to issue from the interior of the building, by those who passed near it at night,—and how the inmates themselves were often aroused from their slumbers by strange noises resembling the rattling of chains, the working of ponderous machinery, and the revolution of huge wheels.

Such food for scandal as these mysterious whispers supplied, was not likely to pass without exaggeration; and that love of the marvellous which inspired the aforesaid gossips, led to the embellishment of the rumours just glanced at,—so that one declared with a solemn shake of the head, how spirits were seen to glide around the convent walls at night,—and another averred that a nun, with whom she was acquainted, had assured her that strange and unearthly forms were often encountered by those inmates of the establishment who were hardy enough to venture into the chapel, or to traverse the long corridors or gloomy cloisters after dusk.

These vague and uncertain reports did not, however, prevent some of the wealthiest families in Florence from placing their daughters in the Carmelite Convent. A nobleman or opulent citizen who had several daughters, would consider it a duty to devote one of them to the service of the Church; and the votive girl was most probably compelled to perform her novitiate and take the veil in this renowned establishment. It was essentially the convent patronised by the aristocracy; and no female could be received within its walls save on the payment of a considerable sum of money.

There was another circumstance that added to the celebrity and augmented the wealth of the Carmelite Convent. Did a young unmarried lady deviate from the path of virtue,—or did a husband detect the infidelity of his wife,—the culprit was forthwith consigned to the care of the Abbess, and forced to take up her abode in that monastic institution. Or again—did some female openly neglect her religious duties, or imprudently express an opinion antagonistic to the Roman Catholic Church, the family to which she belonged would remove her to the spiritual care of the Abbess.

The convent was therefore considered to be an institution recognised by the State as a means of punishing immorality, upholding the interests of the Catholic religion—persuading the sceptical—confirming the wavering—and exercising a salutary terror over the ladies of the upper class, at that time renowned for their dissolute morals. The aristocracy of Florence patronised and protected the institution—because its existence afforded a ready means to get rid of a dishonoured daughter or an unfaithful wife; and it was even said that the Abbess was invested with extraordinary powers by the rescript of the Duke himself,—powers which warranted her interference with even the liberty of young females who were denounced to her by their parents, guardians, or others who might have a semblance of a right to control or coerce them.

Luther had already begun to make noise on Germany; and the thunders of his eloquence had reverberated across the Alps to the Italian States. The priesthood were alarmed, and the conduct of the Reformer was an excuse for rendering the discipline of monastic institutions more rigid than ever. Nor was the Abbess Maria a woman who hesitated to avail herself of this fact as an apology for strengthening her despotism, and widening the circle of her influence.

The reader has now heard enough to make him fully aware that the Carmelite Convent was an establishment enjoying an influence, exercising an authority, and wielding a power, which—if these were misdirected—constituted an enormous abuse in the midst of a State bearing the name of a Republic. But the career of the Medici was then hastening towards a close; and, in proportion as the authority of the Duke became circumscribed, the encroachments of the ecclesiastical orders grew more extensive.

The Abbess Maria, who was far advanced in years, but was endowed with one of those vigorous intellects against which Time vainly directs its influence, received the Lady Nisida in a little parlour plainly furnished. The praying-desk was of the most humble description; and above it rose a cross of wood, so worm-eaten and decayed, that it

seemed as if the grasp of a strong hand would crush it into dust. But this emblem of the creed had been preserved in the Carmelite Convent since the period of the second Crusade, and was reported to consist of a piece of the actual cross on which the Saviour suffered in Palestine.

Against the wall hung a scourge, with five knotted thongs, whereon the blood-stains denoted the severity of that penance which the Abbess frequently inflicted upon herself. On a table stood a small loaf of coarse bread and a pitcher of water; for although a sumptuous banquet was every day served up in the refectory, the Abbess was never known to partake of the delicious viands, nor to place her lips in contact with wine.

When Nisida entered the presence of the Abbess, she sank on her knees, and folded her arms meekly across her bosom. The holy mother gave her a blessing, and made a motion for her to rise. Nisida obeyed, and took a seat near the Abbess at the table.

She then drew forth her tablets, and wrote a few lines, which the superior read with deep attention.

Nisida placed a heavy purse of gold upon the table, and the Abbess nodded an assent to the request contained in the lines inscribed on the tablet.

The interview was about to terminate, when the door suddenly opened, and an elderly nun entered the room.

"Ursula," said the Lady Abbess, in a cold but reproachful tone, "dost thou not know that I was engaged? What means this abrupt intrusion?"

"Pardon me, holy mother!" exclaimed the nun; "but the rumour of such a frightful murder has just reached us—"

"A murder!" ejaculated the Abbess. "Oh! unhappy Florence, when wilt thou say farewell to crimes which render thy name detestable amongst Italian States!"

"This deed, too, holy mother, is one of inordinate blackness," continued Sister Ursula. "A young and beautiful lady—"

"We know not personal beauty within these walls," daughter," interrupted the Abbess, sternly.

"True, holy mother! and yet I did but repeat the tale as the portress ere now related it to me. However," resumed Ursula, "it appears that a young female, whom the worldly-minded outside these sacred walls denominate beautiful, was barbarously murdered this morning—shortly after the hour of sunrise—"

"Within the precincts of Florence?" inquired the Abbess.

"Within a short distance of the convent, holy mother," answered the nun. "The dreadful deed was accomplished in the garden attached to the mansion of a certain Signor Wagner, whom the worldly-minded style a young man wondrously handsome."

"A fair exterior often conceals a black heart, daughter," said the Abbess. "But who was the hapless victim?"

"Rumour declares, holy mother—"

The nun checked herself abruptly, and glanced at Nisida, who, during the above conversation had approached the windows which commanded a view of the convent garden, and whose back was therefore turned towards the Abbess and Ursula.

"You may speak fearlessly, daughter," said the Abbess; "that unfortunate lady hears you not—for she is both deaf and dumb."

"Holy Virgin, succour her!" ejaculated Ursula, crossing herself. "I was about to inform your ladyship," she continued, "that rumour represents the murdered woman to have been the sister of that Signor Wagner of whom I spoke; but it is more than probable that there was no tie of relationship between them—and that—"

"I understand you, daughter," interrupted the Abbess.

"Alas! how much wickedness is engendered in this world by the sensual, fleshly passion which mortals denominate Love! But is the murderer detected?"

"The murderer was arrested immediately after the perpetration of the crime," responded Ursula: "and at this moment he is a prisoner in the dungeons of the palace."

"Who is the lost man that has perpetrated such a dreadful crime?" demanded the Abbess, again crossing herself.

"Signor Wagner himself, holy mother," was the reply.

"The pious Duke Cosmo bequeathed gold to this institution," said the Abbess, "that masses might be offered up for the souls of those who fall beneath the weapon of the assassin. See that the lamented Prince's instructions be not neglected in this instance, Ursula."

"It was to remind your ladyship of this duty that I ventured to break upon your privacy," returned the nun, who then withdrew.

The Abbess approached Nisida, and touched her upon the shoulder to intimate to her that they were again alone together.

She had drawn down her veil; and was leaning her forehead against one of the iron bars which protected the window—apparently in a mood of deep thought.

When the Abbess touched her, she started abruptly round—then, pressing the Superior's hand with convulsive violence, hurried from the room.

ducal palace, was that gloomy prison, having no window, save a grating in the massive door to admit the air.

A lamp burnt dimly upon the table, whereon stood also the coarse prison fare provided for the captive, but which was untouched.

The clanking of the weapons of the sentinels, who kept guard in the passage from which the various dungeons opened, fell mournfully upon Fernand's ears, and every moment reminded him of the apparent impossibility of escape—even if such an idea possessed him.

The lamp had burnt throughout the day in his dungeon; for the light of heaven could not penetrate to that

"HE DASHED THROUGH THE FUNERAL TRAIN." (See p. 23.)

The old portress presented the alms-box as she opened the gate of the convent; but Nisida pushed it rudely aside, and hurried down the steps as if she were escaping from a lazaret-house rather than issuing from a monastic institution.

## CHAPTER XVII.

WAGNER IN PRISON.—A VISITOR.

It was evening; and Wagner paced his narrow dungeon with agitated steps.

Far beneath the level of the ground, and under the

horrible subterranean cell—and it was only by the payment of gold that he had induced his gaoler to permit him the indulgence of the artificial substitute for the rays of the glorious sun.

"Oh! wretched being that I am!" he thought within himself, as he paced the stone floor of his prison-house: "the destiny of the accursed is mine! Ah! fool—dotard that I was to exchange the honours of old age for the vicissitudes of a renewed existence! Had Nature taken her course, I should probably now be sleeping in the quiet grave—and my soul might be in the regions of the blessed! But the tempter came and dazzled me with prospects of endless happiness, and I succumbed! O

Faust! would that thou hadst never crossed the threshold of my humble cottage in the Black Forest! How much sorrow—how much misery should I have been spared! Better—better to have remained in poverty—solitude—helplessness—worn down by the weight of years, and crushed by the sense of utter loneliness,—oh, better to have endured all this than to have taken on myself a new tenure of that existence which is so marked with misery and woe!"

He threw himself upon a seat, and endeavoured to reflect on his position with calmness; but he could not.

Starting up, he again paced the dungeon in an agitated manner.

"Holy God!" he exclaimed, aloud, "how much wretchedness has fallen upon me in a single day! Agnes murdered; Nisida, perhaps, for ever estranged from me—myself accused of a dreadful crime, wherof I am innocent—and circumstances all combining so wonderfully against me! But who could have perpetrated the appalling deed? Can that mysterious lady, whom Agnes spoke of so frequently, and who, by her description, so closely resembled my much-loved Nisida—can she—"

At that moment the bolts were suddenly drawn back from the door of the dungeon—the clanking chains fell heavily on the stone pavement outside—and the gaoler appeared, holding a lamp in his hand.

"Your brother, signor, has come to visit you," said the turnkey. "But pray let the interview be a brief one—for it is as much as my situation and my own own liberty are worth, to have admitted him without an order from the Chief Judge."

With these words the gaoler made way for a cavalier to enter the dungeon; and as he closed the door, he said, "I shall return shortly to let your brother out again."

Surprise had hitherto placed a seal on Wagner's lips; but even before the visitor had entered the cell, a faint suspicion—a wild hope had flashed to his mind that Nisida had not forgotten him—that Nisida would not abandon him!

But this hope was destroyed almost as soon as it was born, by the sudden recollection of her affliction; for he could not see how any woman could succeed in bribing the gaoler, one so cautious and wary as the gaoler of a criminal prison?

Nevertheless, the moment the visitor had entered the cell, and in spite of the deep disguise which she wore, the eyes of the lover failed not to recognise the object of his adoration in that elegant cavalier who now stood before him.

Scarcely had the gaoler closed and bolted the massive door again, when Fernand rushed forward to clasp Nisida in his arms; but, imperiously waving her hand, she motioned him to stand back.

Then with the language of the fingers, she rapidly demanded, "Will you swear upon the cross that the young female who has been murdered was not your mistress?"

"I swear," answered Fernand, in the same symbolic manner; and, as the light of the lamp played on his handsome countenance, his features assumed so decided an expression of truth, frankness, and sincerity, that Nisida was already more than half convinced of the injustice of her suspicions.

But still she was determined to be completely satisfied; and, drawing forth a small but exquisitely sculptured crucifix from her doublet, she presented it to her lover.

He sank upon one knee, received it respectfully, and kissed it without hesitation.

Nisida then threw herself into his arms, and embraced him with a fondness as warm—as wild—as impassioned as her suspicions had ere now been vehement and fearfully resentful.

Her presence caused Fernand to forget his sorrow—to forget that he was in a dungeon—to forget also the tremendous charge that hung over his head. For never had he seen Nisida appeared to him so marvellously beautiful as he now beheld her, disguised in the graceful garb of a cavalier of that age. Though tall, majestic, and of rich proportions for a woman, yet in the attire of the opposite sex, she seemed slight, short, and eminently graceful. The velvet cloak set so jauntily on her sloping shoulder, the doublet became her symmetry so well, and the rich lace-collar was so arranged as to disguise the prominence of the chest—that voluptuous fulness which could not be compressed!

At length a sudden thought struck Fernand, and he inquired in the usual manner how Nisida had gained access to him?

"A faithful friend contrived this interview for me," she replied, with her wonted rapidity of play upon the

fingers. "He led the gaoler to believe that I was a German, and totally unacquainted with the Italian tongue. Thus not a word was addressed to me; and gold has opened the doors which separated me from you. The same means shall secure your escape."

"Dearest Nisida," signalled Wagner, "I would not escape were the door of my dungeon left open and the sentinels removed. I am innocent, and that innocence must be proved!"

The lady exhibited extraordinary impatience at this reply.

"You do not believe me guilty?" asked Wagner.

She shook her head in a determined manner, to show how profound was her conviction of his innocence.

"Then do not urge me, beloved one, to escape and be dishonoured for ever," was the urgent prayer he conveyed to her.

"The evidence against you will be overwhelming," she gave him to understand; then with an air of the most heart-appealing supplication, she added, "Escape, dearest Fernand—for my sake!"

"But I should be compelled to fly from Florence; and wouldst thou accompany me?"

She shook her head mournfully.

"Then will I remain here—in this dungeon! If my innocence be proved, I may yet hope to call the sister of the Count of Riverola my wife; if I be condemned—"

He paused;—for he knew that, even if he were sentenced to death, he could not die,—that some power, of which, however, he had only a vague notion, would rescue him,—that the compact, which gave him renewed youth and a long life on the fatal condition of his periodical transformation into a horrid monster, must be fulfilled; and though he saw not—understood not how all this was to be, still he knew that it would happen if he should really be condemned!

Nisida was not aware of the motive which had checked her lover as he was conveying to her his sense of the dread alternatives before him; and she hastened to intimate to him the following thought:—"You would say, that if you be condemned you will know how to meet death as becomes a brave man? But think of me—of Nisida, who loves you!"

"Would you continue to love a man branded as a murderer?"

"I should only think of you as my own dear Fernand!"

He shook his head—as much as to say, "It cannot be!"—and then once more embraced her fondly—for he beheld, in her anxiety for his escape, only a proof of her ardent affection.

At this moment the gaoler returned; and while he was unbolting the door, Nisida made one last, imploring appeal to her lover to give his assent to escape, if the arrangements were made for that purpose.

But he conveyed to her his resolute determination to meet the charge, with the hope of proving his innocence; and for a few moments Nisida seemed convulsed with the most intense anguish of soul.

The gaoler made his appearance, and Wagner, to maintain the deceit which Nisida informed him to have been practised on the man, said a few words aloud in German, as if he were really taking leave of a brother.

Nisida embraced him tenderly; and, covering her countenance as much as possible with her slouched hat, the waving plumes of which she made to fall over her face, this extraordinary being issued from the cell.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

FLORA FRANCATELLI.—THE THREE NUNS.—THE CHAIR.

NISIDA regained her apartment, by the private staircase, without any molestation. Having laid aside her male attire, she assumed a loose wrapper, and then, throwing herself into an arm-chair, gave way to her reflections.

These were apparently of no pleasant nature; for they were frequently interrupted by convulsive starts and rapid glances around the room—as if she were fearful lest some terrible spectre was present to scare her.

Once or twice her eyes lingered upon her mother's portrait; and then profound sighs escaped her bosom.

Presently the beautiful Flora Francatelli entered the apartment; but Nisida made her a sign of dismissal.

The maiden withdrew: and we must now follow her to her own chamber.

On reaching her bed-room, Flora did not immediately retire to rest. She felt that should not sleep, even were

she to seek her pillow: for she had much—very much to ponder upon!

There was a marked—an undisguised reserve about her mistress which materially affected her. Although she could not control her affections, yet she felt as if she were acting with duplicity towards the Lady Nisida, in having listened to the love-tale of Francisco, and retaining that revelation of affection a secret in her own breast.

Yet had he not implored, had he not enjoined her to keep that avowal to herself? Yes:—and when she looked at the matter, as it were face to face, she could not justly reproach herself:—nevertheless, that secret love weighed upon upon her conscience like a crime!

She could not understand wherefore Nisida's manner had changed towards her. Francisco had assuredly made no communication to his sister; and nothing had transpired to excite a suspicion of the real truth in her mind. Still there was a coolness on the part of that lady; or might it not be that Flora's imagination deceived her?

There was another, and even a more serious cause of grief weighing on her mind. Despatches had been received by the nobleman in whose suite her brother Alessandro had repaired to Constantinople; and the Secretary to the Council of Florence had intimated to Signora Francatelli (Flora's aunt) that Alessandro had abjured the faith of his forefathers and had embraced the Mussulman creed. It was also stated that the young man had entered the service of the Grand Vizier; but whether he had become a renegade through love for some Turkish maiden, or with the hope of ameliorating his condition in a worldly point of view, whether, indeed, self-interest or a conscientious belief in the superiority of the Moslem doctrines over those of Christianity, had swayed Alessandro, no one could say.

His aunt was almost heart-broken at the news; Father Marco, through whose influence he had obtained the post of Secretary to the Florentine envoy, was shocked and grieved; and Flora was not the less afflicted at an event which, as she had been taught to believe, must inevitably place her much-beloved brother beyond the hope of spiritual salvation.

Amidst the gloomy reflections excited by the Lady Nisida's coolness, and the disagreeable tidings which had been received concerning her brother, there was nevertheless one gleam of consolation for Flora Francatelli.

This was the love which Francisco entertained for her—and which she so tenderly, so sincerely reciprocated.

Yes—a maiden's first love is ever a source of solace amidst the gloom of affliction, because it is so intimately intertwined with hope! For the soul of the innocent, artless girl who fondly loves, soars aloft in a heaven of their own creation, dove-like on the wings of faith!

It was already late when Flora began to unbind and set at liberty her dark brown tresses, preparatory to retiring to rest,—when a low knock at the chamber-door startled her in the midst of her occupation.

Thinking it might be the Lady Nisida who required her attendance, she hastened to open the door; and immediately three women, dressed in religious habits, and having black veils thrown over their heads so as completely to conceal their faces, entered the room.

Flora uttered a faint scream—for the sudden apparition of those spectre-like figures, at such a late hour of the night, was well calculated to alarm even a person of maturer age and stronger mind than Signora Francatelli.

"You must accompany us, young lady," said the foremost nun, advancing towards her. "And beware how you create any disturbance, for it will avail you nothing."

"Whither am I to be conducted?" asked Flora, trembling from head to foot.

"That we cannot inform you," was the reply. "Neither must you know at present; and, therefore, our first duty is to blindfold you."

"Pity me—have mercy upon me!" exclaimed Flora, throwing herself upon her knees before the nun who addressed her in so harsh, so stern a manner. "I am a poor, unprotected girl; have mercy upon me!"

But the three nuns seized upon her, and, while one held the palm of her hand forcibly over her mouth, so as to check her utterance, the others hastily blindfolded her.

Flora was so overcome by this alarming proceeding, that she fainted.

When she came to her senses, she found herself lying

on a hard and sorry couch in a large apartment almost entirely denuded of furniture, and lighted by a feebly-burning lamp suspended to the low ceiling.

For a moment she thought she was labouring under the influence of a hideous dream; but, glancing around, she started with affright, and a scream burst from her lips, when she beheld the three nuns standing by the bed.

"Why have you brought me hither?" she demanded, springing up in the couch and addressing the recluses with frantic wildness.

"To benefit you in a spiritual sense," replied the one who had before acted as spokesman; "to purge your mind of those mundane vanities which have seized upon it, and to render you worthy of salvation. Pray, sisters—pray for this at present benighted creature!"

Then, to the surprise of the young maiden, the three nuns all fell upon their knees around her, and began to chant a solemn hymn in most lugubrious notes.

They had thrown aside their veils, and the flickering light of the dim lamp gave a ghastly and unearthly appearance to their pale and severe countenances. They were all three elderly persons, and their aspect was of that cold, forbidding nature, which precludes hope on the part of anyone who might have to implore mercy.

The young maiden was astounded—stupefied!—she knew not what to conjecture. Where was she? who were those nuns that had treated her so harshly? why was she brought to that cold, cheerless apartment? what meant the hymn that seemed chanted expressly on her account?

She could not bear up against the bewilderment and alarm produced by the questions which she asked herself, and none of which she could solve. An oppressive sensation came over her; and she was about to sink back upon the couch upon which she had risen, when the hymn suddenly ceased—the nuns rose from their suppliant posture, and the foremost, addressing the poor girl, in a reproachful tone, exclaimed, "Oh, wicked—worldly-minded creature,—repent—repent—repent!"

There was something so awful—so appalling in this strange conduct on the part of the nuns, that Flora began to doubt whether she were not labouring under some terrible delusion. She feared lest her senses were leaving her; and, covering her face with her hands, so as to close her eyes against external objects, she endeavoured to look inwards, as it were, and scrutinize her own soul.

But there was not allowed time to reflect; for the three nuns seized upon her, the foremost saying, "You must come with us."

"Mercy! mercy!" screamed the wretched girl, vainly struggling in the powerful grasp of the recluses.

Her long hair, which she had unbraided before she was carried off from the Riverola mansion, floated over her shoulders, and enhanced the expression of ineffable despair which her pallid countenance now wore.

Wildly she glanced around her, as she was being hurried from the room, and frantic screams escaped her lips. But there was no one nigh to succour her—no one to melt at the outbursts of her anguish!

The three nuns dragged rather than conducted her into an adjacent apartment, which was lighted by a lamp of astonishing brilliancy, and hung in a skylight raised above the roof.

On the floor, immediately beneath this lamp, stood an arm-chair of wicker-work, and from this chair two stout cords ascended to the ceiling, through which they passed by means of two holes perforated for the purpose.

When Flora was dragged by the nuns to the immediate vicinity of the chair, which her excited imagination instantly converted into an engine of torture, that part of the floor on which the chair stood seemed to tremble and oscillate beneath her feet, as if it were a trap-door.

The most dreadful sensations now came over her. She felt as if her brain were reeling—as if she must go mad.

A fearful scream burst from her lips, and she struggled with the energy of desperation as the nuns endeavoured to thrust her in the chair.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, frantically; "you shall not torture me—you dare not murder me! What have I done to merit this treatment? Mercy, mercy!"

But her cries and her struggles were alike useless, for she was now firmly bound to the chair, into which the nuns had forced her to seat herself.

Then commenced the maddening scene, which will be found in the ensuing chapter.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE DESCENT.—THE CHAMBER OF PENITENCE.

HAVING bound Flora Francatelli to the chair, in the manner just described, the three nuns fell back a few paces, and the wretched girl felt the floor giving way under her.

A dreadful scream burst from her lips as slowly, slowly the chair sank down; while the working of hidden machinery in the roof, and the steady, monotonous revolution of wheels, sounded with ominous din upon her ears.

An ice-stream seemed to pour over her soul. Wildly she cast around her eyes; and then more piercing became her shrieks, as she found herself gradually descending into what seemed to be a pit or well, only that it was square instead of round.

The ropes creaked, the machinery continued its regular movement, and the lamp fixed in the skylight overhead became less and less brilliant.

And bending over the mouth of this pit into which she was descending were three nuns, standing motionless and silent, like hideous spectres, on the brink of the aperture left by the square platform, or trap, whereon the chair was fixed.

"Mercy, mercy!" exclaimed Flora, in a voice expressive of the most acute anguish.

And, stretching forth her snowy arms (for it was round the waist and by the feet that she was fastened to the chair), she convulsively placed her open palms against the wooden walls of the pit, as if she could by that spasmodic movement arrest the descent of that terrible apparatus that was bearing her down into that hideous, unknown gulf.

But the walls were smooth and even, and presented nothing to which she could cling—nothing whereon she could fix her grasp.

Her brain reeled, and for a few minutes she sat motionless in dumb, inert despair.

Then again, in obedience to some mechanical impulse, she glanced upwards. The light of the lamp was now dimly seen, like the sun through a dense mist; but the dark figures were still bending over the brink of the abyss, thirty yards above.

The descent was still progressing, and the noise of the machinery still reached her ears, with buzzing, humming, monotonous indistinctness.

She shrieked not now—she screamed not any more; but it was not resignation that sealed her lips—it was despair.

Suddenly she became aware of the gradual disappearance of the three nuns. As she descended, the wall seemed to rise slowly upwards, and cover them from her view.

Then, for an instant, there was a slight shock given to the platform whereon the chair was placed, as if it rested on something beneath.

But, no; the fearful descent still went on: for, when she again stretched forth her hand to touch the walls, they appeared to be slowly rising, rising.

She was now involved in almost total darkness; but far, far overhead the dim lustre of the lamp was seen: and the four walls of the gulf now appeared to touch the ceiling of the room above, and to enclose that faint but still distinct orb within the narrow square space thus shut in.

The noise of the machinery also reached her still; but merely with a humming sound that was only just audible.

For an instant she doubted whether she was still descending; but, alas! when her arms were a third time convulsively stretched forth, her fair hands felt the walls slipping away from her touch—gliding upwards, as it were, with steady motion.

Then she knew that the descent had not ceased.

But whither was she going?—to what awful depth was she progressing?

Already, she conjectured, was she at least sixty yards beneath that dim yellow orb which every instant appeared to shine as through a deeper, deepening mist.

For what fate was she reserved, and where was she?

Suddenly it struck her she was an inmate of the Carmelite Convent; for the rumours alluded to in a preceding chapter had often met her ears, and her imagination naturally associated them with the occurrences of that dreadful night.

The piercing shrieks, the noise of machinery, the disappearance from time to time of some member of that monastic institution—all the incidents, in fine, to which

those rumours had ever pointed, now seemed to apply to her own case.

These reflections flashed with lightning rapidity through her brain, and paralysed her with horror.

Then she lost all further power of thought; and, though not absolutely fainting, she was stunned and stupefied with the tremendous weight of overwhelming despair.

How long she remained in this condition she knew not; but she was suddenly aroused by the opening of a low door in the wall in front of her.

Starting as from a dreadful dream, she stretched forth her arms, and became aware that the descent had stopped; and at the same moment she beheld a nun, bearing a lamp, standing on the threshold of the door which had just opened.

"Sister, welcome to the Chamber of Penitence!" said the recluse, approaching the terrified Flora.

Then, placing the lamp in a niche near the door, the nun proceeded to remove the cords which fastened the young maiden to the chair.

Flora rose, but fell back again on the seat—for her limbs were stiff in consequence of the length of time they had been retained in one position. The nun disappeared by the little door for a few minutes; and, on her return, presented the wretched girl a cup of cold water. Flora swallowed the icy beverage and felt refreshed.

Then by the light of the lamp in the niche she hastily examined the countenance of the nun; but its expression was cold—repulsive—stern; and Flora knew that it was useless to seek to make a friend of her. A frightful sense of loneliness, as it were, struck her like an ice-shaft penetrating to her very soul; and, clasping her hands together, she exclaimed, "Holy Virgin, protect me!"

"No harm will befall you, daughter," said the nun, "if you manifest contrition for past errors and a resolution to devote your future years to the service of Heaven."

"My past errors!" repeated Flora, with mingled indignation and astonishment. "I am not aware that I ever injured a living soul by word or deed—nor entertained a thought for which I need to blush. Neither have I neglected those duties which manifest the gratitude of mortals for the bounties bestowed upon them by Providence."

"Ah! daughter," exclaimed the nun; "you interpret not your own heart rightly. Have you never abandoned yourself to those carnal notions—those hopes—those fears—those dreams of happiness, which constitute the passion that the world calls love?"

Flora started, and a blush mantled on her cheeks, before so palpable a charge.

"You see that I have touched a chord which vibrates to your heart's core, daughter," continued the nun, on whom that sudden evidence of emotion was not lost. "You have offered yourself to be deluded by the whisperings of that feeling whose tendency was to wean your soul from Heaven."

"And is it possible that a pure and virtuous love can be construed into a crime?" demanded the young maiden, her indignation overpowering her fears.

"A love that is founded on, and fostered by ambition, is a sin," replied the nun. "Marriage is doubtless an institution ordained by Heaven; but it becomes a curse, and is repulsive to all pious feelings, when it unites those whose passion is made up of sensuality and selfishness."

"You dare not impute such base considerations to me!" exclaimed Flora, her cheeks again flushing, but with the glow of conscious innocence shamefully outraged by the most injurious suspicions.

"Nay, daughter," continued the nun, unmoved by the manner of the young maiden; "you are unable to judge rightly of your own heart. You possess a confidence in integrity of purpose, which is but a mental blindness on your part."

"Of what am I accused, and wherefore am I brought hither?" asked Flora, beginning to feel bewildered by the sophistry that characterized the nun's discourse.

"Those who are interested in your welfare," replied the nun, evasively, "have consigned you to the care of persons devoted to the service of Heaven, that your eyes may be opened to the vanity of the path which you have been pursuing, but from which you are so happily rescued."

"And where am I? Is this the Convent of the Carmelites? Why was I subjected to all the alarms—all the mental tortures through which I have just passed?" demanded the young maiden, wildly and rapidly.

"Think not that we have acted towards you in the spirit of persecution," said the nun. "The mysteries which have alarmed you will be explained at a future period, when your soul is prepared, by penitence, self-mortification, and prayer, to receive the necessary revelation. In the meantime, ask no questions; forget the world—and resolve to embrace a life devoted to the service of Heaven."

"To embrace a conventual existence?" almost shrieked the wretched girl. "Oh, no—never!"

"Not many days will elapse ere your mind will undergo a salutary change," said the nun, composedly. "But if

At the foot of the altar knelt five women, half naked, and holding scourges in their hands.

"These are the Penitents," whispered the nun to Flora. "Pause for a moment, and contemplate them."

A minute elapsed, during which the five penitents remained motionless as statues, with their heads bowed upon their bosoms, and their arms hanging down by their sides, as if those limbs were lifeless—save in respect to the hands that held the scourges. But suddenly one of them—a young and beautiful woman—exclaimed, in a tone of piercing anguish, "It is my fault! it is my

"THE BLOW WAS WELL AIMED." (See p. 26.)

you will now follow me—as you appear to be somewhat recovered—I will conduct you to your cell adjoining the Chamber of Penitence."

Flora, perceiving that any further attempt to reason with the recluse would be fruitlessly made, arose and followed her into a long, narrow, dark passage, at the end of which was a door standing half open.

The nun extinguished her lamp, and led the way into a large apartment, hung with black. At the farther end there was an altar, surmounted by a crucifix of ebony, and lighted up with four wax candles, which only served to render the gloom of the entire scene more apparent.

fault! it is my fault!" and the others took up the wail in voices equally characteristic of heartless woe.

Then they lacerated their shoulders with the hard leathern thongs of their scourges; and a faintness came over Flora Francatelli when she observed the blood appear on the back of the young and beautiful penitent who had given the signal for this self-mortification.

The nun, perceiving the effect thus produced upon the maiden, touched her upon the shoulder as a signal to follow whither she was about to lead; and, opening one of several doors communicating with the Chamber of Penitence, she said, in a low whisper, "This is your cell. May the Virgin bless you!"

Flora entered the little room allotted to her, and the nun retired, simply closing, but not bolting the door behind her.

A taper burnt before a crucifix suspended to the wall; and near it hung a scourge, from which last-mentioned object Flora averted her eyes with horror.

A bed, a simple toilette-table, a praying-desk, and a single chair, completed the furniture of the cell, which was of very narrow dimensions.

Seating herself on the bed, Flora burst into an agony of tears.

What would her aunt think when she received the news of her disappearance? for she could not suppose that any friendly feeling on the part of her persecutors would induce them to adopt a course which might relieve that much-loved relative's mind concerning her. What would Francisco conjecture? Oh! these thoughts were maddening!

Anxious to escape from them, if possible, the almost heart-broken girl proceeded to lay aside her garments and retire to rest.

Physical and mental exhaustion cast her into a deep sleep; but the horrors of her condition pursued her even in her dreams, so that when she awoke she was not startled to find herself in that gloomy cell.

Casting her eyes around, she observed two circumstances which showed her that someone had visited her room during the hours she slept; for a new taper was burning before the crucifix, and her own garments had been removed, the coarse garb of a penitent now occupying their place on the chair.

"Oh! it is possible that I am doomed to bid farewell to the world for ever?" exclaimed Flora, in the voice of despair, as she clasped her hands convulsively together.

## CHAPTER XX.

FRANCISCO AND NISIDA.—DR. DURAS AND THE LETTER.

THE greatest confusion prevailed in the Riverola palace when, in the morning, the disappearance of Flora Francatelli was discovered.

Nisida hastened at an early hour to her brother's apartment, and intimated to him the fact that she was nowhere to be found.

Francisco, who was already dressed, was overwhelmed with grief at this announcement, and, in the first access of excitement, conveyed to her his intention of seeking the young maiden throughout the city.

He was hastening to quit the room, when Nisida held him back, and intimated to him that his anxiety in this respect would create suspicions injurious alike to his reputation and that of Flora Francatelli—the more so as she was but a menial in the household.

Francisco paused, and reflected for a few moments. Then, having tenderly embraced his sister, he hastily addressed her by the symbolic language in which they were accustomed to converse.

"Pardon me, beloved Nisida, for having kept a secret from thee—the only one that my heart has ever so selfishly cherished."

Nisida appeared to be profoundly astonished at this communication, and made an impatient sign for him to proceed.

"You will not be surprised at my anxiety to seek after the missing girl," he continued, "when I intimate to you that I love her, and that, next to yourself, she is dearer to me than I can express."

"Your passion can scarcely be an honourable one, Francisco," was the reproach conveyed by Nisida, while her countenance wore a corresponding expression.

"I would sooner die than harbour an injurious thought in respect to that virtuous and beautiful creature!" responded the young Count, his face flushing with the glow of generous emotions. "My happiness is intimately connected with this attachment, Nisida; and I feel convinced that you would rather forward my views than oppose them."

"Yes, dear brother," was the reply which she conveyed to him; "your happiness is my only consideration."

But, as she gave this assurance, an ill-subdued sigh escaped her breast; and she compressed her lips tightly to crush the emotions that were agitating her. A cloud evanescently appeared on the broad and marble forehead; the pencilled brows contracted; and the eyes flashed brightly—oh! far more brightly than glanced the ray of the morning sun through the windows upon the glossy surface of her luxuriant hair. A momentary

spasm seemed to convulse that full and rounded form; and the small and elegantly-shaped foot which peered from beneath her flowing robe, tapped the floor twice with involuntary movement.

Misses as she usually was of even her most intense feelings, and wonderfully habituated by circumstances to exercise the most complete command over her emotions, she was now for an instant vanquished by the gush of painful sentiments which crowded on her soul.

Francisco did not, however, observe that transitory evidence of acute feeling on the part of his sister—a feeling which seemed to partake of the nature of a remorse, as if she were conscience-stricken!

For she loved her brother deeply, tenderly, but after the fashion of her own wild and wonderful disposition—a love that was not calculated always to prove friendly to his interests.

Francisco paced the room in an agitated manner.

At length he stopped near where his sister was standing, and intimated to her that Flora might perhaps have repaired to the residence of her aunt.

Nisida conveyed to him this answer: "The moment that I missed Flora ere now, I despatched a domestic to her aunt's cottage; but she has not been there since Sunday last."

"Some treachery is at work here, Nisida," was the young Count's response. "Flora has not willingly absented herself."

At this moment Francisco's page entered the apartment to announce that Dr. Duras was in the reception-room.

The young Count made a sign to his sister to accompany him; and they proceeded to the elegant saloon where the physician was waiting.

Having saluted the Count and Nisida with his usual urbanity, Dr. Duras addressed himself to the former, saying, "I have just learnt from your lordship's page that the favourite attendant on your sister has most unaccountably disappeared."

"And both Nisida and myself are at a loss what to conjecture or how to act," replied Francisco.

"Florence is at this moment the scene of dreadful crimes," observed the physician. "Yesterday morning a young female was murdered by a near neighbour of mine—"

"I was astounded when I heard of the arrest of Signor Wagner on such a charge," interrupted the Count. "He was latterly a frequent guest at this house—although, I believe, you never happened to meet him here?"

"No," answered the physician. "But I saw him at the funeral of your lamented father, and once or twice since in the gardens attached to his mansion; and I certainly could not have supposed, from his appearance, that he was a man capable of so black a crime. I was, however, about to observe, that Florence is at this moment infested by a class of villains who hesitate at no deed of turpitude. This Signor Wagner is a foreigner, possessed of immense wealth, the sources of which are totally unknown; and, moreover, it is declared that the sbirri, yesterday morning, actually traced the robber-captain, Stephano, to the vicinity of his mansion. All this looks black enough, and it is more than probable that Wagner was in league with the redoubtable Stephano and his banditti. Then the mysterious disappearance of Flora is, to say the least, alarming; for, I believe, she was a well-conducted—virtuous—estimable young woman."

"She was—she was, indeed!" exclaimed Francisco. "At least," he added, perceiving that the physician was somewhat astonished at the enthusiasm with which he spoke—"at least, such is my firm impression; such, too, is the opinion of my sister."

"The motive which brought me hither this morning," said Doctor Duras, "was to offer you a little friendly advice, which my long acquaintance with your family, my dear Count, will prevent you from taking amiss."

"Speak, doctor—speak your thoughts!" cried Francisco, pressing the physician's hand gratefully.

"I would recommend you to be more cautious how you form an intimacy with strangers," continued Dr. Duras. "Rumour has a thousand tongues—and it is already reported in Florence, that the alleged murderer was on familiar terms with the noble Count of Riverola and the Lady Nisida."

"The Duke himself is liable to be deceived in respect to the real character of an individual," said Francisco, proudly.

"But his Highness would not form hasty acquaintances," replied the physician. "After all, it is with the

best possible feeling that I offer you my counsel—knowing your generous heart, and also how frequently generosity is imposed upon.”

“Pardon the impatience with which I answered you, my dear friend,” exclaimed the young Count.

“No pardon is necessary,” exclaimed the physician; “because you did not offend me. One word more—and I must take my leave. Crimes are multiplying thickly in Florence, and Stephano’s band becomes each day more and more daring; so that it is unsafe to walk alone in the city after dusk. Beware how you stir abroad unattended, my dear Francisco, at unreasonable hours.”

“My habits are not of that nature,” replied the Count. “I, however, thank you cordially for your well-meant advice. But you appear to connect the disappearance of Flora Francatelli,” he added, very seriously, “and the dreadful deed supposed to be committed by Signor Wagner?”

“I merely conjecture that this Wagner is associated with that lawless horde who have become the terror of the Republic,” answered the physician; “and it is natural to suppose that these wretches are guilty of all the enormous crimes which have lately struck the city with alarm.”

Francisco turned aside to conceal the emotions which these remarks excited within him; for he now began to apprehend that she whom he loved so fondly had met with foul play at the hands of the bravos and banditti whom Stephano was known to command.

Dr. Duras seized that opportunity to approach Nisida, who was standing at the window; and as he thrust into her hand a note, which she immediately concealed in her dress, he was struck with surprise and grief at the acute anguish that was depicted upon her countenance.

Large tears stood on her long, dark lashes, and her face was ashy pale.

The physician made a sign of anxious inquiry; but Nisida, subduing her emotions with an almost superhuman effort, pressed his hand violently, and hurried from the room.

Dr. Duras shook his head mournfully; but also in a manner that showed that he was at a loss to comprehend that painful manifestation of feeling on the part of one whom he well knew to be endowed with almost miraculous powers of self-control.

His meditations were interrupted by Francisco, who, addressing him abruptly, said, “In respect to the missing young lady, whose absence will be so acutely felt by my sister, the only course which I can at present pursue is to communicate her mysterious disappearance to the Captain of Police.”

“No time should be lost in adopting that step,” responded the doctor. “I am about to visit a sick nobleman in the neighbourhood of the Captain’s office. We will proceed so far in each other’s company.”

The young Count summoned his page to attend upon him, and then quitted the mansion in company with the physician.

In the meantime Nisida had retired to her own apartment, where she threw herself into a seat, and gave vent to the dreadful emotions which had for the last half-hour been agitating within her bosom.

She wept—oh! she wept long and bitterly! It was terrible and strange to think that that woman of iron mind now yielded to the outpourings of her anguish.

Some time elapsed ere she even attempted to control her feelings; and then her struggle to subdue them was as sudden and energetic as her grief had a moment previously been violent and apparently inconsolable.

Then she recollected the note which Dr. Duras had slipped into her hand, and which she had concealed in her bosom; and she hastened to peruse it.

The contents ran as follow:—

“In accordance with your request, my noble-hearted and much-enduring friend, I have consulted eminent lawyers in respect to the will of the late Count of Rive-rola. The substance of their opinion is unanimously this:—The estates are unalienably settled on yourself, should you recover the faculties of hearing and speaking at any time previously to your brother’s attainment of the age of thirty; and should you enter into the possession of the estates and allow your brother to enjoy the whole or greater part of the revenue, in direct contradiction to the spirit of your father’s will, the estates would become liable to confiscation to his Highness the Duke. In this case your brother and yourself would alike be ruined.”

“Now, the advice that these lawyers give is this:—A memorial should be addressed to his Highness, exhibiting that you refuse to undergo any surgical treatment or operation for the restoration of the faculties of hearing and speech, inasmuch as you would not wish to deprive your brother of the enjoyment of the estates, nor of the title conferred by their possession; that you, therefore, solicit a decree confirming his title of nobility, and dispensing with the prerogative of confiscation on the part of the Prince, should you recover the faculties of hearing and speech, and act in opposition to the will of your late father in respect to the power of alienating the estates from your own possessions.”

“Such, my generous-minded friend, is the counsel offered by eminent advocates: and by the memory of your sainted mother—if not for the sake of your own happiness—I implore you to act in accordance with these suggestions. You will remember that this advice pretty accurately corresponds with that which I gave you, when, late on the night that the will was read, you quitted your sleepless couch and came to my dwelling to consult me on a point so intimately connected with your felicity in this world.

“Your sincerely devoted friend,

“JERONIMO DURAS.”

While Nisida was occupied in the perusal of the first paragraph of this letter dark clouds lowered upon her brow; but as she read the second paragraph, wherein the salutary advice of the lawyers was conveyed to her, those clouds rapidly dispersed, and her splendid countenance became lighted up with joyous, burning, intoxicating hope.

It was evident that she had already made up her mind to adopt the counsel proffered her by the eminent advocates whom the friendly physician had consulted on her behalf.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE SUBURB OF ALLA CROCE.—THE JEW.—THE ROBBER CHIEF’S LOVE.

It was past the hour of ten on Saturday night, when a tall, powerfully-built man emerged from what might be termed the fashionable portion of the city of Florence, and struck into the straggling suburb of Alla Croce.

This quarter of the town was of marvellously bad reputation, being infested by persons of the worst description, who, by herding, as it were, together in one particular district, had converted the entire suburb into a sort of sanctuary where crime might take refuge, and into which the sbirri, or police-officers, scarcely dared to penetrate.

The population of Alla Croce was not, however, entirely composed of individuals who were at variance with the law; for poverty, as well as crime, sought an asylum in that assemblage of forbidding-looking dwellings, which formed so remarkable a contrast with the marble palaces, noble public buildings, and handsome streets of the city of Florence itself.

And not only did the denizens of penury and crushing toil—the artisans, the vine-dressers, the gardeners, the water-carriers, and the porters of Florence—occupy lodgings in the suburb of Alla Croce; but even wealthy persons—yes, men whose treasures were vast enough to pay the ransoms of princes—buried themselves and their households in this horrible neighbourhood.

We allude to that undeservedly persecuted race—the Jews—a race endowed with many virtues and generous qualities, but whose characters have been blackened by a host of writers whose narrow minds and illiberal prejudices have induced them to preserve all the exaggerations and misrepresentations which tradition hands down in the Christian world relative to the cruelly-treated Israelite.

The enlightened commercial policy of those merchant-princes, the Medici, had, during the primal glories of their administrative sway in the Florentine Republic, relaxed the severity of the laws against the Jews; and, recognising in the persecuted Israelites those grand trading and financial qualities which have ever associated the idea of wealth with their name, permitted them to follow unmolested their specific pursuits.

But at the time of which we are writing—the year 1521—the Prince who held the reins of Florentine Government had yielded to the representations of a bigoted and intolerant clergy, and the Jews had once more become the subjects of persecution. The dissipated nobles extorted from them by menace those loans which

would not have been granted on the security proffered; and the wealthy members of the "scattered race" actually began to discover that they could repose greater confidence in the refuse of the Florentine population than in the brilliant aristocracy, or even in the famous sbirri themselves. Thus had many rich Jews established themselves in the quarter of Alla Croce; and by paying a certain sum to the Syndic, or magistrate of this suburb—a functionary elected by the inhabitants themselves, and in virtue of a law of their own enactment—the persecuted Israelites enjoyed comparative security and peace.

We now return to the man we left plunging into the suburb of which we have offered a short account.

This individual was dressed in a simple attire, but composed of excellent materials. His vest was of dark velvet, slashed, but not embroidered; and on his breast he wore a jazeran, or mailed cuirass, which was not only lighter than a steel corselet, but was equally proof against poniard or pike. In his broad leather belt were stuck two pairs of pistols, and a long dagger: a heavy broadsword also hung by his side. His black boots came up nearly to the knee—in contravention of the prevailing fashion of that age, when those articles of dress seldom reached above the swell of the leg. A large slouched hat, without plume or any ornament, was drawn down as much as possible over his features; and the broad *mantello*, or cloak, was gathered round the body in such a manner that it covered all the left side and the weapons fastened in the belt, but left the sword arm free for use in any sudden emergency.

Behind the wayfarer stretched the magnificent city of Florence—spreading over deep vale, on both sides of the Arno, and, as usual, brilliant with light like a world of stars shining in mimic rivalry of those that studded the purple vault above.

Before him were the mazes of the Alla Croce, the darkness of which suburb was only interrupted by a few straggling and feeble lights gleaming from houses of entertainment, or from huts whose poverty required not the protection of shutters to the casements.

And now—as one of those faint lights suddenly fell upon the wayfarer's countenance, as he passed the abode in which it shone—let us avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded by that glimpse, to state that this man's features were handsome, but coarse, and bearing the traces of a dissolute life. His age was apparently forty: it might have been been a few years more matured—but his coal-black hair, mustachio, and bushy whiskers, unstreaked by silver, showed that time sat lightly on his head, in spite of the evident intimacy with the wine-cup above alluded to.

Having threaded the greater portion of the suburb, which was almost knee-deep in mud—for it had been raining nearly all day, and had only cleared up after sunset—the individual whom we have been describing stopped at the corner of a street, and gave a shrill whistle.

The signal was immediately answered in a similar fashion: and in a few minutes a man emerged from the darkness of the bye-street. He also was well-armed, but much more plainly dressed than the other; and his countenance was such as would not have proved a very friendly witness in his favour in a court of justice.

"Lomellino?" said the first individual whom we have described in this chapter.

"Captain Stephano?" responded the other, in a low tone.

"All right, my fine lad," returned the bandit-captain. "Follow me."

The two robbers then proceeded in silence, until they reached a house larger and stronger in appearance than any other in the same street. The shutters which protected the casements, were massive and strengthened with iron bars and huge nails, somewhat after the fashion of church-doors. The walls were of solid grey stone, whereas those of the adjacent huts were of mud or wood. In a word, this dwelling seemed a little fortress in the midst of an exposed and unprotected town.

Before this house the robbers stopped.

"Do you remain on the other side of the street, Lomellino," said the bandit-chief: "and, if need be, you will answer to my accustomed signal."

"Good! Captain!" was the reply; and Lomellino crossed over the way to the deep shade of the houses on that side.

Stephano then gave a low knock at the door of the well-defended dwelling above described.

Several minutes elapsed: and no sounds were heard within.

"The old usurer is at home, I know," muttered Stephano to himself; for the moment he had knocked a gleam of light, peeping through a crevice in an upper casement, had suddenly disappeared.

He now rapped more loudly at the door with the handle of his heavy broadsword.

"Ah! he comes," muttered the bandit-chief, after another long pause.

"Who knocks so late?" demanded a weak and tremulous voice from within.

"I—Stephano Verrina!" cried the brigand, pompously; "open—and fear not!"

The bolts were drawn back—a chain fell heavily on the stone floor inside—and the door opened, revealing the form of an old and venerable-looking man, with a long white beard. He held a lamp in his hand; and by its fitful glare, his countenance, of the Jewish cast, manifested an expression denoting the terror which he vainly endeavoured to conceal.

"Enter, Signor Stephano," said the old man. "But wherefore here so late?"

"Late do ye call it, Signor Isaacar?" ejaculated the bandit, crossing the threshold. "Meseems there is yet time to do a world of business this night, for those who have the opportunity and the inclination."

"Ah! but you and yours turn night into day," replied the Jew, with a chuckle intended to be of a conciliatory nature; "or rather you perform your avocations at a time when others sleep."

"Every one to his calling, friend Isaacar," said the brigand-chief. "Come! have you not made that door fast enough yet? you will have to open it soon again—for my visit will be none of the longest."

The Jew having replaced the chains and fastened the huge bolts which protected the house-door, took up the lamp and led the way to a small and meanly furnished room at the back of his dwelling.

"What business may have brought you hither to-night, good Captain Verrina?" he inquired, in a tone of ill-subdued apprehension.

"Not to frighten thee out of thy wits, good Isaacar," responded Stephano, laughing.

"Ah! ha!" exclaimed the Jew, partially reassured: "perhaps you have come to pay me the few crowns I had the honour to lend you—without security, and without interest—"

"By my patron saint! thou wast never more mistaken in thy life, friend Isaacar," interrupted the robber-chief. "The few crowns you speak of, were neither more nor less than a tribute paid on consideration that my men should leave unscathed the dwelling of worthy Isaacar ben Solomon; in other words, that thy treasure should be safe at least from them."

"Well—well! be it so!" cried the Jew. "Heaven knows I do not grudge the amount in question—although," he added, slowly, "I am compelled to pay almost an equal sum to the Syndic."

"The Syndic of Alla Croce and the Captain of the banditti are two very different persons," remarked Stephano. "The magistrate protects you from those over whom he has control; and I, on my side, guarantee you against the predatory visits of those over whom I exercise command. But let us to business."

"Aye—to business!" echoed the Jew, anxious to be relieved from the state of suspense into which this visit had thrown him.

"You are acquainted with the young, beautiful, and wealthy Countess of Arestino, Isaacar?" said the bandit.

The Jew stared at him in increased alarm, now mingled with amazement.

"But, in spite of all her wealth," continued Stephano, "she was compelled to pledge her diamonds to thee, to raise the money wherewith to discharge a gambling debt contracted by her lover, the high-born, handsome, but ruined Marquis of Orsini!"

"How knowest thou all this?" anxiously inquired the Jew.

"From her ladyship's own lips," responded Stephano. "At least, she told me that she had raised the sum to accommodate a very particular friend. Now, as the transaction is unknown to her husband, and as I am well assured that the Marquis of Orsini is really on some excellent terms with her ladyship,—moreover, as this same Marquis did pay a certain heavy gambling debt within an hour after the diamonds were pledged to you,—it requires but little ingenuity to put all these circumstances together, to arrive at the result which I have mentioned. Is it not so, Isaacar?"

"I know not the motive for which the money was raised," answered the Jew, wondering what was coming next.

"Oh! then the money was raised with you," cried Stephano; "and consequently you hold the diamonds."

"I did not say so—I—"

"A truce to this fencing with my words!" ejaculated the bandit, impatiently. "I have an unconquerable desire to behold these diamonds—"

"You, good Captain!" murmured Isaachar, trembling from head to foot.

"Yes—I! And wherefore not? Is there anything so marvellous in a man of my refined taste and exquisite notions, taking a fancy to inspect the jewels of one of the proudest beauties of gay Florence? By my patron saint! you should thank me that I come in so polite a manner to request a favour, the granting of which I could so easily compel without all this tedious circumlocution."

"The diamonds!" muttered the Jew, doubtless troubled at the idea of surrendering the security which he held for a very considerable loan.

"Perdition seize the man!" thundered Stephano, now waxing angry. "Yes—the diamonds, I say; and fortunate will it be for you if they are produced without farther parley."

Thus speaking, the bandit suffered his cloak to fall from over his belt, and the Jew's quick eye recoiled from the sight of those menacing weapons with which his visitor was armed as it were to the teeth.

Then, without further remonstrance, but with many profound sighs, Isaachar proceeded to fetch a small iron box from another room; and in a few moments the diamond-case, made of sandal-wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, was in the bandit captain's hands.

"Let me convince myself that it is all right?" exclaimed Stephano, examining the lid of the case. "Yes—there are the arms of Arestino, with the cyphers of the Countess, G. A.—Giulia Arestino—a very pretty name, by my troth! Ah! how the stones sparkle!" he cried, as he opened the case. "And the inventory is complete—just as it was described to me by her ladyship. You are a worthy man, Isaachar—a good man: you will have restored tranquillity to the mind of this beautiful Countess," continued Stephano, in a bantering tone; "and she will be enabled to appear at court to-morrow, with her husband. Good-night, Isaachar: my brave men shall receive orders to the effect that the first who dares to molest you, may reckon upon swinging to the highest tree that I can find for his accommodation."

"You violate your compact, Signor Verrina!" exclaimed the Jew, his rage now mastering his fears. "Wherefore should I pay you tribute to protect me, when you enter my house and rob me thus vilely?"

"In this case a lady is concerned, good Isaachar," responded the bandit, calmly: "and you know that with all true cavaliers the ladies are pre-eminent. Once more, a fair night's repose, my much respected friend!"

Thus saying, Stephano Verrina rose from the seat on which he had been lounging; and the Jew, knowing that altercation and remonstrance were equally useless, hastened to afford the means of egress to so unwelcome a visitor.

Stephano lingered a moment opposite the house until he heard the door bolted and chained behind him: then, crossing the street, he rejoined his follower Lomellino.

"All right, Captain?" said the latter, inquiringly.

"All right," answered Stephano. "Poor Isaachar is inconsolable, no doubt; but the Countess will be consoled at his expense. Thus it is with the world, Lomellino: what is one person's misery is another's happiness."

"Dost grow sentimental, good Captain?" exclaimed the man, whose ears were entirely unaccustomed to such language on the part of his chief.

"Lomellino, my friend," answered Verrina, "when a man is smitten in a certain organ, commonly called the heart, he is apt to give utterance to that absurdity which the world denominates sentiment. Such is my case."

"You are then in love, Captain?" said Lomellino, as they retraced their way through the suburb of Alla Croce.

"Just so," replied the bandit-chief. "I will tell you how it happened. Yesterday morning, when those impertinent sbirri gave me a harder run than I have ever yet experienced, I was fain to take refuge in the garden of that very same Signor Wagner—"

"Who was yesterday arrested for murder?" interrupted Lomellino.

"The identical one," returned Stephano. "I concealed myself so well that I knew I might bid defiance to those bungling sbirri—although their scent was sharpened by the hope of the reward set on my head by the Prince. While I thus lay hidden, I beheld a scene that would have done good to the heart of even such a callous fellow as yourself—I mean callous to female qualifications. In a word, I saw one woman stab another as effectually as—"

"But it was Wagner who killed the woman!" ejaculated Lomellino.

"No such thing!" said Stephano, quietly. "The murderess is of the gentle sex—though she can scarcely be gentle in disposition. And such a splendid creature, Lomellino! I beheld her countenance for a few minutes, as she drew aside her veil that her eyes might glare upon her victim; and I whispered to myself, *'That woman must be mine: she is worthy of me'*. Then the blow descended—her victim lay motionless at her feet—and I never took my eyes off the countenance of the murderess. *'She is an incarnate fiend,'* I thought; *'and admirably fitted to mate with the Bandit-Captain.'*—Such was my reflection then; and the lapse of a few hours has only served to strengthen the impression. You may now judge whether I have formed an unworthy attachment!"

"She is worthy of you, Captain!" exclaimed Lomellino. "Know you who she is?"

"Not a whit," replied Stephano. "I should have followed her when she left the garden, and complimented her on her proficiency in handling a poniard: but I was not so foolishly as to stand the chance of meeting the sbirri. Moreover, I shall speedily adopt measures to discover who and what she is; and when I present myself to her, and we compare qualifications, I do not think there can arise any obstacle to our happiness, as lovers are accustomed to say."

"Then it was she who murdered the Lady Agnes?" said Lomellino.

"Have I not told you so? Signor Wagner is as innocent of that deed as the babe unborn; but it is not for me to step forward in his behalf, and thereby criminate a lady on whom I have set my affections."

"That were hardly to be expected, Captain," returned Lomellino.

"And all that I have now told thee, thou wilt keep to thyself," added Stephano: "for to none else of the band do I speak so freely as to thee."

"Because no one is so devoted to his Captain as I," rejoined Lomellino. "And now that we are about to separate," added the man, as they reached the verge of the suburb, which was then divided by a wide, open space from the city itself, and might even be termed a detached village,—"now that we are about to separate, Captain, allow me to ask whether the affair for Monday night still holds good?"

"The little business at the Riverola palace, you mean?" said Stephano. "Most assuredly! You and Piero will accompany me. There is little danger to be apprehended; and Antonio has given me the necessary information. Count Francisco sleeps at a great distance from the point where we must enter; and as for his sister—she is as deaf as if she had her ears sealed up."

"But what about the pages—the lacqueys—"

"Antonio will give them all a sleeping draught. Everything," added the robber-chief, "is settled as cleverly as can be."

"Antonio is your cousin, if I err not?" asked Lomellino.

"Something of the kind," replied Stephano: "but what is better and more binding—we are friends. And yet, strange to say, I never was within the precincts of the Riverola mansion until the night before last; and—more singular still—I have never, to my knowledge, seen any members of the family in whose service Antonio has been so long."

"Why, Florence is not honoured by your presence during the daytime," observed Lomellino; "and at night the great lords and high-born ladies who happen to be abroad, are so muffled up—the former in their cloaks, and the latter in their veils—"

"True—true; I understand all you would say, Lomellino," interrupted the Captain; "but you know how to be rather tedious at times. Here we separate,—I to repair to the Arestino palace—and you—"

"To the cavern," replied Lomellino; "where I hope to sleep better than I did last night," he added.

"What! a renewal of those infernal shriekings and



screamings that seem to come from the bowels of the earth?" exclaimed the Captain.

"Worse than ever," answered Lomellino. "If they continue much longer, I must abandon my office of treasure-keeper, which compels me to sleep in the inner-most room."

"That cannot be allowed, my worthy friend," interrupted the Captain; "for I should not know whom to appoint in your place. If it were not that we should betray our own stronghold," continued Stephano, emphatically, "we would force our way into the nest of our noisy neighbours, and levy such a tribute upon them as would put them on their good behaviour for the future."

"The scheme is really worth consideration," remarked Lomellino.

"We will talk more of it another time," said the Captain. "Good-night, Lomellino. I shall not return to the cavern until very late."

The two banditti then separated—Lomellino striking off to the right, and Stephano Verrina pursuing his way towards the most aristocratic quarter of Florence.

Upon entering the sphere of marble palaces, brilliantly lighted villas, and gay mansions, the robber-chief covered his face with a black mask—a mode of disguise so common at that period, not only amongst ladies, but also with cavaliers and nobles, that it was not considered at all suspicious, save as a proof of amatory intrigue, with which the *sbirri* had no right of interference.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE COUNTESS OF ARESTINO.

WE must now introduce our readers to a splendid apartment in the Arestino palace.

This room was tastefully decorated and elegantly furnished. The tapestry was of pale blue; and the ottomans, ranged round the walls in oriental style, were of rich crimson satin embroidered with gold. In the middle stood a table covered with ornaments and rich trinkets lately arrived from Paris—for France already began to exercise the influence of its superior civilization and refinement over the south of Europe.

The ceiling of that room was a masterpiece of the united arts of sculpture and painting. First, the hand of the sculptor had carved it into numerous medallions, on which the pencil of the painter had then delineated the most remarkable scenes in early Florentine history. Round the sides, or cornices, were, beautifully sculptured in marble, the heads of the principal ancestors of the Count of Arestino.

It was within a few hours of midnight, and the beautiful Giulia Arestino was sitting restlessly upon an ottoman,—now holding her breath to listen if a step were approaching the private door behind the tapestry—then glancing anxiously towards a cleydsdra on the mantel.

"What can detain him thus? will he deceive me?" she murmured to herself. "Oh, how foolish!—worse than foolish!—mad—to confide in the promise of a professed bandit! The jewels are worth a thousand times the reward I have pledged myself to give him. Wretched being that I am!"

And with her fair hand she threw back the dark masses of hair that had fallen too much over her polished brow;—and on this polished brow she pressed that fair hand—for her head ached with the intensity of mingled suspense and alarm.

Her position was indeed a dangerous one, as the reader is already aware. In the infatuation of her strong—unconquerable—but not less guilty love for the handsome spendthrift, Orsini, she had pledged her diamonds to Isachar ben Solomon for an enormous sum of money, every ducent of which had passed without an hour's delay into the possession of the young Marquis. Those diamonds were the bridal gift of her fond and attached, but, alas! deceived husband, who, being many years older than herself, studied constantly how to afford pleasure to the wife of whom he was so proud. He was himself an extraordinary judge of the nature, purity, and value of precious stones; and being immensely rich, he had collected a perfect museum of curiosities in that particular department. In fact, it was his amateur study;—and as we should say in these times, his peculiar hobby;—and hence the impossibility of imposing on him by the substitution of a hired or false set of diamonds for those which he had presented to his wife.

It was therefore absolutely necessary to get these diamonds back from Isachar, by fair means or foul. The fair means were to redeem them by the payment of the

loan advanced upon them; but the sum was so large, that the Countess dared not make such a demand upon her husband's purse, because the extravagances of her lover had lately compelled her to apply so very, very frequently to the Count for a replenishment of her funds. The foul means were therefore resorted to—an old woman, who had been the nurse of the Countess in her infancy, and to whom in her distress she applied for advice, having procured for the patrician lady the services of Stephano Verrina, the bandit-captain.

It is not to be wondered at, then, if the Countess of Arestino were a prey to the most poignant anxiety, as each successive quarter of an hour passed without bringing either Stephano or any tidings from him. Even if she feigned illness, so as to escape the ceremony of the following day, the relief would only be temporary—for the moment she should recover, or affect to recover, her husband would again require her to accompany him to the receptions of the Prince.

Giulia's anguish had risen to that point at which such feelings become intolerable, and suggest the most desperate of remedies—suicide, when a low knock behind the pale-blue arras suddenly imparted hope to her soul.

Hastily raising the tapestry on that side whence the sound had emanated, she drew back the bolt of a little door communicating with a private staircase (usually found in all Italian mansions at that period); and the robber-chief entered the room.

"Have you succeeded?" was Giulia's rapid question.

"Your ladyship's commission has been executed," replied Stephano, who, we should observe, had laid aside his black mask ere he appeared in the presence of the Countess.

"Ah! now I seem to live—to breathe again!" cried Giulia, a tremendous weight suddenly removed from her mind.

Stephano produced the jewel-case from beneath his cloak; and as the Countess hastily took it—nay, almost snatched it from him, he endeavoured to imprint a kiss upon her fair hand.

Deep was the crimson glow which suffused her countenance—her neck—even all that was revealed of her breast, as she drew back haughtily, and with a sublime patrician air of offended pride.

"I thank you—thank you from the bottom of my soul, Signor Verrina," she said in another moment: for she felt how completely circumstances had placed her in the power of the bandit-chief, and how useless it was to offend him. "Here is your reward;"—and she presented him a heavy purse of gold.

"Nay—keep that jingling metal, lady," said Stephano: "I stand in no need of it—at least for the present. The reward I crave is of a different nature, and will even cost you less than you proffer me."

"What other recompense can I give you?" demanded Giulia, painfully alarmed.

"A few lines, written by that fair hand to my dictation," answered Stephano.

Giulia cast upon him a look of profound surprise.

"Here, lady—take my tablets, for I see that your own are not at hand," cried the chief. "Delay not—it grows late—and we may be interrupted."

"We may indeed," murmured Giulia, darting a rapid look at the water-clock. "It is within a few minutes of midnight."

She might have added—"And at midnight I expect a brief visit from Manuel d'Orsini, ere the return of my husband from a banquet at a friend's villa." But of course this was her secret: and anxious to rid herself of the company of Stephano, she took the tablets with trembling hands and prepared to write.

"I, Giulia Countess of Arestino," began the brigand, dictating to her, "confess myself to owe Stephano Verrina a deep debt of gratitude for his kindness in recovering my diamonds from the possession of the Jew Isachar, to whom they were pledged for a sum which I could not pay."

"But wherefore this document?" exclaimed the Countess, looking up in a searching manner at the robber-chief; for she had seated herself at the table to write, and he was leaning over the back of her chair.

"Tis my way at times," he answered, carelessly, "when I perform some service for a noble lord or a great lady, to solicit an acknowledgment of this kind in preference to gold." Then, sinking his voice in a low whisper, he added, with an air of deep meaning, "Who knows but that this document may some day save my head?"

Giulia uttered a faint shriek—for she comprehended in a moment how cruelly she might sooner or later be compromised through that document, and how entirely she was placing herself in the bandit's power.

But Stephano's hand clutched the tablets whereon the Countess had, almost mechanically, written to his subtle dictation; and he said, coolly, "Fear not, lady: I must be reduced to a desperate strait indeed, when my safety shall depend on the use I can make of this fair handwriting."

Giulia felt partially relieved by this assurance; and it was with ill-conditioned delight that she acknowledged the ceremonial bow with which the bandit-chief intimated his readiness to depart.

But at that moment three low and distinct knocks were heard at the little door behind the arras.

Giulia's countenance became suffused with blushes; then, instantly recovering her presence of mind, she said, in a rapid, earnest tone, "He who is coming knows nothing concerning the jewels, and will be surprised to find a stranger with me. 'Perhaps he may even recognise you—perhaps he knows you by sight—"

"What would you have me do, lady?" demanded Stephano. "Speak—and I obey you."

"Conceal yourself—here—and I will soon release you."

She raised the tapestry on the opposite side to that by which Stephano had entered the room; and the robber-chief hid himself in the wide interval between the hangings and the wall.

All this had scarcely occupied a minute; and Giulia now hastened to open the private door, which instantaneously gave admittance to the young, handsome, and dissipated Marquis of Orsini.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### THE LOVE OF WOMAN.—GIULIA AND HER LOVER.

SILENCE, and calmness, and moonlight were without the walls of the Arestino villa; for the Goddess of Night shone sweetly but coldly on the city of Florence, and asserted her empire even over the clouds that ere now had seemed laden with storm. Nor beamed she there alone—that fair Diana; for a countless host of hand-maidens—the silver-faced stars—had spread themselves over the deep purple sky; and there—there they all shone in subdued and modest glory—those myriads of beacons floating on the eternal waves of that far-off and silent sea!

Shine on, sweet Regent of the Night—and ye, too, silver-faced stars, whose countenances are reflected and multiplied endlessly, as they are rocked to and fro, on the deep blue bosom of the Arno! while on the banks of that widely-famed stream, Nature herself, as if wearied of her toils, appears to be sleeping.

Would that the soul of man could thus lie down in its night of sorrow or of racking passion, on the margin of the waters of Hope,—confident that the slumber of contentment and peace will seal his eyelids heavy with long vigils in a world where conflicting interests need constant watchings, and that the stillness of the unfathomable depths of those waters will impart its influence unto him!

For, Oh! if calmness, silence, and moonlight prevail without the walls of the Arestino villa,—yet within there be hearts agitated by passions and emotions from which the gentle Genius of Slumber shrinks back aghast.

In the brilliantly-lighted apartment, to which we have already introduced our readers, the Countess Giulia receives her lover, the dissipated but handsome Marquis of Orsini:—the bandit-captain is concealed behind the richly-worked tapestry;—and at the door—not the little private one of that room—an old man is listening;—an old man whose ashy pale countenance, clenching hands, quivering white lips, and wildly rolling eyes, indicate how terrible are the feelings which agitate within his breast.

This old man was the Count of Arestino—one of the mightiest nobles of the Republic. Naturally his heart was good, and his disposition kind and generous:—but then he was an Italian—and he was jealous! Need we say more to account for the change which had now taken place in his usually calm, tranquil, yet dignified demeanour?

Or shall we inform our readers, that at the banquet to which he had been invited at a friend's villa that evening, he had overheard two young nobles, in a conversation which the generous wine they had been too freely

imbibing rendered indiscreetly loud, couple the names of Giulia Arestino—his own much-loved wife—and Manuel d'Orsini in a manner which suddenly excited a fearful—a blasting suspicion in his mind. Stealing away unperceived from the scene of revelry, the Count had returned unattended to the immediate vicinity of his mansion; and from the shade of a detached building, he had observed the Marquis of Orsini traverse the gardens, and enter the portico leading to the private staircase communicating with that wing of the palace which contained the suite of apartments occupied by Giulia.

This was enough to strengthen the suspicion already excited in the old nobleman's mind; but not quite sufficient to confirm it. The Countess had several beautiful girls attached to her person; and the Marquis might have stooped to an intrigue with one of them. The Lord of Arestino was therefore resolved to act with the caution of a prudent man; but he was also prepared to avenge, in case of the worst, with the spirit of an Italian.

He hurried round to the principal entrance of his palace, and gave some brief but energetic instructions to a faithful valet, who instantly departed to execute them: the Count then ascended the marble staircase—traversed the corridors leading towards his lady's apartments—and placed himself against the door of that one wherein Giulia has already received her lover.

Thus, while silence, and calmness, and moonlight reign without—yet within the walls of the Arestino mansion a storm has gathered, to explode fearfully.

And all through the unlawful, but not less ardent love of Giulia for the spendthrift Marquis of Orsini!

Sober-minded men—philosophic reasoners—persons of business-habits—stern moralists,—all these may ridicule the poet or the novelist who makes Love his everlasting theme: they may hug themselves in the apathy of their own cold hearts, with the belief that all the attributes of the passion have been immensely exaggerated; but they are in error—deeply, profoundly, indisputably in error! For Love, in its various phases, amongst which are Jealousy, Suspicion, Infidelity, Rivalry, and Revenge, has agitated the world from time immemorial—has overthrown empires—has engendered exterminating wars, and has extended its despotic sway alike over the gorgeous city of a consummate civilisation, and the miserable wigwam of a heathen barbarism? Who, then, can wonder if the theme of Love be universal—that it should have evoked the rude and iron evidence of the Scandinavian Scald, as well as the soft and witching poetry of the bards of more genial climes; or that its praises or its sorrows should be sung on the banks of the Arno, the Seine, or the Thames, as well as amidst the pathless forests of America, or the burning sands of Africa, or in the far-off islands of the Southern Seas?

But alas! it is thou, O Woman! who art called on to make the most cruel sacrifices at the altar of this imperious deity—Love! If thou lovest honourably, 'tis well: but if thou lovest unlawfully, how wretched is thy fate! The lover, for whose sake thou hast forgotten thy duties as a wife, has sacrificed nothing to thee, whilst thou hast sacrificed everything to him. Let the amour be discovered—and who suffers? Thou! He loses not caste—station—name—nor honour: thou art suddenly robbed of all those! The gilded saloons of fashion throw open their doors to the seducer: but bars of adamant defend that entrance against the seduced! For his sake thou risketh costutely—shame—reviling—scorn—and the lingering death of a breaking heart: for thee he would not risk one millionth part of all that! Shouldst thou be starving, say to him, "Go forth and steal to give me bread: dare the dishonour of the deed—and make the sacrifice of thy good name for me. Or go and forge—or scindle—or lie foully, so that thou bringest me bread; for have not I dared dishonour, made the sacrifice of my good name, and done as much—aye, far more than all that for thee?" Shouldst thou, poor seduced, weak one, address thy seducer thus, he will look upon thee as a fiend-like tempter—he will rush from thy sight—he will never see thee more—his love will be suddenly converted into hatred! Yes—man demands that Woman should dishonour herself for his sake; but he will not allow a speck to appear upon what he calls his good name—no, not to save that poor, confiding, lost creature from the lowest depths and dregs of penury into which her frailty may have plunged her!

Such is the selfishness of man! Where is his chivalry?

But let us return to the Arestino palace.

The moment Manuel d'Orsini entered the apartment

by means of the private door, he embraced Giulia with a fondness which was more than half affected—at least on that occasion; and she herself returned the kiss less warmly than usual—but this was because she was constrained and embarrassed by the presence of the bandit-captain, who was concealed behind the tapestry.

"You appear cool—distant, Giulia," said Manuel, casting upon her an inquiring glance.

"And you either love me less—or you have something on your mind," returned the Countess, in a low tone.

"In the first instance you are wrong—in the second you are right, well beloved," answered the Marquis.

"But tell me—"

"Speak lower, Manuel—we may be overheard—some of my dependants are in the adjacent room, and—"

"And you wish me to depart as soon as possible, no doubt?" said the Marquis, impatiently.

"Oh! Manuel—how can you reproach me thus?" asked Giulia, in a voice scarcely above a whisper; for that woman who dared be unfaithful to her husband revolted at the thought that a coarse-minded bandit should be in a position to overhear her conversation with her lover;—"how can you reproach me thus, Manuel?" she repeated;—"have I not given thee all the proofs of tenderest love which woman can bestow? have I not risked everything for thee?"

"I do not reproach you, Giulia," he replied, pressing his hand to his brow: "but I am unhappy—miserable!"

And he flung himself upon the nearest ottoman.

"Oh! what has occurred to distract thee thus?" exclaimed the Countess, forgetting the presence of Stephano Verrina in the all-absorbing interest of her lover's evident—too evident grief. "Am I ever to find thee oppressed with care—these, who art so young—and so gloriously handsome?" she added, her voice suddenly sinking to a whisper.

Manuel gazed for a few moments, without speaking, on the countenance of his mistress as she leant over him: then in a deep and hollow tone—a tone the despair of which was too real and natural to be in the slightest degree affected, he said, "Giulia, I am a wretch—unworthy of all this sweet love of thine! I have broken the solemn vow which I pledged thee—I have violated my oath—"

"O Manuel!" ejaculated the Countess, still forgetting the presence of the bandit: "thou hast—"

"Gambled once more—and lost!" cried the Marquis, wildly. "And the sum that I am bound in honour to pay on Monday—by noon—is nearly equal in amount to that which thy generosity lent me the other day."

"Holy Virgin aid you, my unhappy Manuel!" said Giulia.

"For thou canst not?" exclaimed the young noble, with a profound sigh. "Oh! I am well aware that I have no claim upon thee—"

"Ah! wherefore that reproach?—for a reproach it is!" interrupted the Countess. "No claim on me! Hast thou not my heart? and in giving thee that, Manuel, I laid at thy feet a poor offering, which, though so poor, yet absorbs all others of which I may dispose! Do not reproach me, Manuel—for I would lay down my life to save thy soul from pain, or thy name from dishonour!"

"Now art thou my own Giulia!" cried the Marquis, pressing her hand to his lips. "An accused fatality seems to hang over me! This habit of gaming entraps me as the wine-cup fascinates the bibber who would fain avoid it, but cannot. Listen to me for one moment, Giulia. In the public casino—which, as thou well knowest, is a place of resort where fortunes are lost and won in an hour—aye, sometimes in a minute—I have met a man whose attire is good and whose purse is well filled, but whose countenance I like as little as I should that of the Captain of the Sbirri, or his Lieutenant, if I had committed a crime. This individual of whom I speak—for I know not his name—was the favoured votary of Dame Fortune who won of me that sum which thy kindness, Giulia, alone enabled me to pay but a few days past. And now am I a second time this man's debtor. An hour ago he entered the casino—he stayed but for ten minutes—and in that time—"

"Oh! Manuel, is not this conduct of thine something bordering on madness?" interrupted the Countess. "And if thou art thus wedded to the fatal habit, how canst thou find room in thy heart for a single gleam of affection for me?"

"Now dost thou reproach me in thy turn, Giulia!" exclaimed the young Marquis. "But believe me, my

angel!" he continued, exerting all his powers to bend her to his purpose,—"believe me when I declare—Oh! most solemnly declare, by all that I put faith in, and by all I hope for hereafter—that could I be relieved from this embarrassment—extricated from this difficulty—"

"Heavens! how can it be done?" interrupted the Countess, casting her eyes wildly around: for the time was passing—she suddenly remembered that the bandit was still concealed in the room—and then, her husband might return earlier than was expected!

"Oh! if you despair of the means, Giulia," said the Marquis, "I must fly from Florence—I must exile myself for ever from the city of my birth, and which is still more endeared to me, because," he added, sinking his voice to a tender tone,—"because, my well-beloved, it contains thee!"

"No, Manuel—you must not quit Florence, and leave a dishonoured name behind thee!" exclaimed this loving woman, who was thus sublimely careful of the reputation of him for whom she had so long compromised her own. "What can be done? would that I had the means to raise this sum—"

"It is with shame that I suggest—" continued Manuel.

"What? Speak—speak! The means?"

"The jewels, dearest—thy diamonds—"

"Merciful heavens! if you did but know all!" cried Giulia, almost frantically. "Those diamonds were pledged to the Jew Isaacar ben Solomon, to raise the sum with which thy last debt was paid, Manuel; and—but forgive me if I did not tell all this before—not half an hour has elapsed since—"

She stopped short; for she knew that the bandit overheard every syllable she uttered.

Nor had she time, even if she possessed the power, to continue her most painful explanation; for scarcely had she thus paused abruptly, when the door burst open, and the Count of Arestino stood in the presence of the guilty pair.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE INJURED HUSBAND, THE GUILTY WIFE, AND THE INSOLENT LOVER.

In fury of heart and agony of mind, rushed the old Lord into that apartment. Oh! how had he even been able to restrain himself so long, while listening at the door? It was that the conversation between his wife and the Marquis had, as the reader is aware, been carried on in so low a tone—especially on the side of the Countess, that he had not been able to gather sufficient to place beyond all doubt the guilt of that fair creature; and, even in the midst of his Italian ire, he had clung to the hope that she might have been imprudent—but not culpable as yet!

Oh! in this case, how gladly would that old Lord have forgiven the past, on condition of complete reformation for the future! He would have removed his young wife far away from the scene of temptation—to a distant estate which he possessed; and there, by gentle remonstrance and redoubled attention, he would have sought to bind her to him by the links of gratitude and respect, if not by those of love.

But this dream—so honourable to that old man's heart—was not to be realized; for scarcely was it conceived, when the discourse of the youthful pair turned upon the diamonds—those diamonds which he had given her on their bridal day!

Giulia spoke clearly and plainly enough then—in spite of the presence of the bandit in that chamber; for she was about to explain to her lover how willingly she would comply with his suggestion to raise upon the jewels the sum he again required,—a readiness on her part which might be corroborated by the fact that she had already once had recourse to this expedient, and for him;—but that she dared not adopt the same course again, as her husband might detect the essence of the valuables ere she could obtain funds to redeem them.

When she acknowledged to her lover that "these diamonds were pledged to the Jew Isaacar ben Solomon, to raise the sum with which his last debt was paid," it flashed to the old nobleman's mind that his wife had exhibited some little confusion when he had spoken to her a day or two previously concerning her jewels; and now it was clear that they had been used as the means to supply the extravagances of an unprincipled spendthrift. How could he any longer cling to the hope that Giulia

was imprudent only, and not guilty? Must she not be guilty, to have made so large a sacrifice and run so great a risk for the sake of the Marquis of Orsini?

It was under the influence of these excited feelings that the Count of Arestino burst into the room.

Fortunately—so far as outward appearance went—there was nothing more to confirm the old nobleman's suspicions;—the youthful pair were not locked in each other's arms; their hands were not even joined. Mannel was seated on the sofa—and Giulia was standing at a short distance from him.

But conscious guilt elicited a faint scream from her

who was himself so taken by surprise at this unembarrassed mode of address, that he began to fancy his ears must have deceived him and his suspicions beguiled him; "on what business could you possibly have needed my services at this late hour?"

"I will explain myself," returned Orsini, who was a perfect adept in the art of dissimulation, and who, never losing his presence of mind, embraced at a glance the whole danger of Giulia's position and his own, and the probability that their conversation might have been overheard: "I was explaining to her ladyship the temporary embarrassment under which I lay, and from

"HE SANK UPON ONE KNEE." (See p. 33.)

lips; and the boiling blood, after rushing to her countenance, seemed to ebb away as rapidly again—leaving her beautiful face as pale as marble; while she clung to the mantel-piece for support.

"I am glad that your lordship is returned," said the Marquis, rising from his seat and advancing towards the Count in a manner so insolently cool and apparently self-possessed, that Giulia was not only astonished but felt her courage suddenly revive: "I was determined—however uncourteous the intrusion, and unseemly the hour—to await your lordship's coming; and as her ladyship assured me that you would not tarry late—"

"My Lord Marquis," interrupted the old nobleman,

which I hoped that your friendship might probably release me—"

"And her ladyship spoke of her diamonds—did she not?" demanded the Count, addressing himself to the Marquis, but fixing a keen and penetrating glance on Giulia.

"Her ladyship was remonstrating with me on my extravagance," hastily replied the Marquis, "and was repeating to me—I must say in a manner too impressive to be agreeable—the words which my own sister had used to me a few days ago, when explaining, as her motive for refusing me the succour which I needed, that she had been compelled to pledge her diamonds—"

"Ah! they were your sister's diamonds that were pledged to Isaacar the Jew?" said the Count, half ironically and half in doubt; for he was fairly bewildered by the matchless impudence of the young Marquis.

"Yes, my lord—my dear sister, who, alas! is ruining herself to supply me with the means of maintaining my rank. And as my sister and her ladyship, the Countess, are on the most friendly terms, as you are well aware, it is not surprising if she should have communicated the secret of the diamonds to her ladyship, and also begged her ladyship to remonstrate with me—"

"Well, my lord," interrupted the Count, impatiently, "your own private affairs have no particular interest for me—at this moment: and as for any business on which you may wish to speak to me, I shall be pleased if you postpone it until to-morrow."

"Your lordship's wishes are commands with me," said Manuel, with a polite salutation; and having made a low bow to Giulia, he quitted the room—not by the private door, be it well understood, but by that which had ere now admitted the Count of Aréstino.

The moment the door had closed behind the Marquis of Orsini, the Count approached his wife, and said, in a cold, severe manner, "Your ladyship receives visitors at a late hour."

He glanced, as he spoke, towards the dial of the cley-sydra, and Giulia followed his look in the same direction: it was half an hour after midnight.

"The Marquis explained to your lordship—or partially so—the motive of his importunate visit," said Giulia, endeavouring to appear calm and collected.

"The Marquis is an unworthy reckless—unprincipled young man," exclaimed the Count, fixing a stern, searching gaze upon Giulia's countenance, as if with the iron of his words he would probe the depths of her soul.

"He is a confirmed gamester—is overwhelmed with debts—and has tarnished, by his profligacy, the proud name that he bears. Even the friendship which existed for many, many years between his deceased father and myself, shall no longer induce me to receive at this house a young man whose reputation is all but tainted, even in a city of dissipation and debauchery, such, as, alas! the once glorious Florence has become! For his immorality is not confined to gaming and wanton extravagance," continued the Count, his glance becoming more keen as his words fell like drops of molten lead upon the heart of Giulia: "but his numerous intrigues amongst women—his perfidy to those confiding and deceived fair ones—"

"Surely, my lord," said the Countess, vainly endeavouring to subdue the writhings of torture which this language excited, "surely the Marquis d'Orsini is wrung by the breath of scandal!"

"No, Giulia: he is an unprincipled spendthrift," returned the Count, who never once took his eyes off his wife's countenance while he was speaking;—"an unprincipled spendthrift," he added emphatically—"a man lost to all sense of honour—a ruined gamester—a heartless seducer—shame, a blot, a stigma upon the aristocracy of Florence;—and now that you are acquainted with his real character, you will recognise the prudence of the step which I shall take to-morrow—that is, to inform him that henceforth the Count and Countess of Aréstino must decline to receive him again at their villa. What think you, Giulia?"

"Your lordship is the master to command, and it is my duty to obey," answered the Countess; but her voice was hoarse and thick—the acutest anguish was rending her soul, and its intensity almost choked her utterance.

"She is guilty!" thought the Count within himself; and to subdue an abrupt explosion of his rage, until he had put the last and most certain test to his lady's faith, he walked twice up and down the room;—then, feeling that he had recovered his powers of self-control, he said, "To-morrow, Giulia, is the reception-day of his Highness the Duke; and I hope thou hast made suitable preparations to accompany me in a manner becoming the wife of the Count of Aréstino."

"Can your lordship suppose for an instant that I should appear in the ducal presence otherwise than as meet and fitting for her who has the honour to bear your name?" said Giulia, partially recovering her presence of mind, as the conversation appeared to have taken a turn no longer painful to her feelings;—for, Oh! cannot the reader conceive the anguish—the moral anguish she had ere now endured, when her husband was heaping ashes on the reputation of her lover!

"I do not suppose that your ladyship will neglect the

preparation due to your rank and to that name which you esteem it an honour to bear, and which no living being should dishonour with impunity!"

Giulia quailed—writhe beneath the searching glance which now appeared literally to glare upon her.

"Nevertheless," continued the Count, "I was fearful you might have forgotten that to-morrow is the reception-day! And while I think of it, permit me to examine your diamonds for a few minutes—to convince myself that the settings are in good order—as you know," he added, with a strange, unearthly kind of laugh, "that I am skilled in the jeweller's craft."

The old man paused; but he thought within himself, "Now, what subterfuge can she invent, if my suspicions be really true, and if my ears did not ere now deceive me?"

How profound, then, was his astonishment, when Giulia, with the calm and tranquil demeanour which innocence usually wears, but with the least, least curl of the upper lip, as if in haughty triumph, leisurely and deliberately drew the jewel-case from beneath a cushion of the ottoman whereon she was seated, and, handing it to him, said, "Your lordship perceives that I had not forgotten the reception which his Highness holds to-morrow, since I ere now brought my diamonds hither to select those which it is my intention to wear."

The Count could have pressed her hand as he took the case in his own—he could have fallen at her feet and demanded pardon for the suspicions which he had entertained—for it now seemed certain beyond all possibility of doubt that the explanation volunteered by the Marquis was the true one;—yes—he could have humbled himself in her presence; but his Italian pride intervened, and he proceeded to examine the diamonds with no other view than to gain time to reflect, how he should account for the abrupt manner in which he had entered the room ere now, and for the chilling behaviour he had maintained towards his wife.

On her side, Giulia, relieved of a fearful weight of apprehension, was only anxious for this scene to have a speedy termination, that she might release the robber-captain from his imprisonment behind the tapestry.

Three or four minutes of profound silence now ensued.

But suddenly the Count started, and uttered an ejaculation of mingled rage and surprise.

Giulia's blood ran cold to her very heart's core—she scarcely knew why.

The suspense was not, however, long—though most painful for, dashing the jewel-case with its contents upon the table, the old nobleman approached her with quivering lips and a countenance ghastly white, exclaiming, "Vile woman! I think thou to impose upon me thus? The diamonds I gave thee are gone—the stones set in their place are counterfeit!"

Giulia gazed up towards her husband's countenance for a few moments in a manner expressive of blank despair; then, falling on her knees before him, and clasping her hands together, she screamed frantically—"Pardon: pardon!"

"Ah; then it is all indeed too true!" murmured the unhappy nobleman, staggering as if with a blow; but, recovering his balance, he stamped his foot resolutely upon the floor, and drawing himself up to his full height, while he half averted his eyes from his kneeling wife, he exclaimed, "Lost—guilty—abandoned woman, how canst thou implore pardon at my hands? For pardon is mercy—and what mercy hast thou shown to me? Giulia, I am descended from an old and mighty race—and tradition affords no room to believe that any one who has borne the name of Aréstino has dishonoured it—until now! Oh! fool—dottard—idiot that I was to think that a young girl could love an aged man like me! For old age is a weed, which, when twined round the plant of love, becomes like the deadly nightshade, and robs the rose-bush of its health! Alas! alas! I thought that in my declining years I should have one to cheer me—one who might respect, if she could not love me—one who would manifest some gratitude for the proud position I have given her, and the boundless wealth that it would have been my joy to leave her. And now that hope is gone—withered—crushed—blighted, woman, by thy perfidy! Oh! wherefore did you accompany the old man to the altar—if only to deceive him? wherefore did you consent to become his bride, if but to plunge him into the depths of misery? You weep! Ah! weep on; and all those tears—be they even so scalding as to make seams on that too fair face—cannot wipe away the stain which

is now affixed to the haughty name of Arestino! Weep on, Giulia: but thy tears cannot move me now!"

And the old lord's tone changed suddenly from the deep, touching pathos of tremulousness to a stern, fixed, cold severity which stifled the germs of hope that had taken birth in the heart of his guilty wife.

"Mercy! mercy!" she shrieked, endeavouring to grasp his hand.

"No!" thundered the Count of Arestino; and he rang violently a silver bell which stood upon the table.

"Holy Virgin! what will become of me? for what fate am I destined?" implored Giulia, frantically.

The old nobleman approached her—gazed on her sternly for nearly a minute—then, bending down, said in a hollow, sepulchral tone, "Thou art doomed to eternal seclusion in the Convent of the Carmelites!"

He then turned hastily round and advanced to the door, to which steps were already distinctly heard drawing near in the corridor.

For an instant Giulia seemed paralyzed by the dreadful announcement that had been made to her: but suddenly a ray of hope flashed on her mind—and, darting towards that part of the tapestry behind which the robber was concealed, she said, in a low and rapid tone, "Thou hast heard the fate that awaits me: I charge thee to seek Manuel d'Orsini, and let him know all."

"Fear not, lady! you shall be saved!" answered Stephano in a scarcely audible but yet profoundly emphatic whisper.

She had only just time to turn away, when the Count's faithful valet, accompanied by three nuns wearing their black veils over their faces, entered the room.

Half-an-hour afterwards the Carmelite Convent received another inmate!

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE MARQUIS OF ORSINI.

UPON quitting the Arestino palace, the Marquis of Orsini suddenly lost that bold, insolent, self-sufficient air with which he had endeavoured to deceive the venerable Count whose wife he had dishonoured.

For dishonour now menaced him.

Where could he raise the sum necessary to liquidate the debt which he had contracted with the stranger at the Casino, or gaming-house? And as the person to whom he found himself thus indebted was a stranger—a total stranger to him, he had no apology to offer for a delay in the payment of the money due.

"Perdition!" he exclaimed aloud, as he issued rapidly from the grounds contingent to the Arestino mansion: "is there no alternative save flight? Giulia cannot assist me—her jewels are gone—they are pledged to the Jew Isaacar—she was telling me so when the Count broke in upon us. What course can I adopt? what plan pursue? Shall the name of Orsini be dishonoured—that proud name which for three centuries has been maintained spotless? No—no: this must not be!"

And in a state of the most painful excitement—so painful, indeed, that it amounted almost to a physical agony—the Marquis hastened rapidly through the mazes of the sleeping city—reckless whether he was going, but experiencing no inclination to repair to his own abode.

The fact of the diamonds of his mistress having been pledged to Isaacar ben Solomon was uppermost in his mind: for the reader must remember that he was unaware of the circumstance of their restoration to Giulia—as it was at the moment when she was about to give him this explanation that the old Lord of Arestino had interrupted their discourse.

The diamonds, then, constituted the pivot on which his thoughts now revolved. They seemed to shine like stars amidst the deep haze which hung upon his mind. Could he not possess himself of them? The name of Orsini would be dishonoured if the gambling debt were not paid; and one bold—one desperate step might supply him with the means to save himself from the impending ruin—the imminent disgrace.

But as the thoughts encouraged by those simple words—"the diamonds"—assumed a more palpable shape in his imagination, he shrank dismayed from the deed which they suggested: for gamster—debauchee—spendthrift as he was, he had never yet perpetrated an act that could be termed a crime. The seduction of the Countess of Arestino was not a crime in his estimation;—Oh! no—because a man may seduce, and yet not be dishonoured in the eyes of the world. It is his victim, or the partner

of his guilty pleasure, only who is dishonoured. Such is the law written in society's conventional code. Vile—detestable—unjust law!

To weigh and balance the reason for or against the perpetration of a crime,—to pause only for an instant to reflect whether the deed shall or shall not be done,—this is to yield at once to the temptation. The desperate man who hovers hesitatingly between right and wrong invariably adopts the latter course.

And Manuel of Orsini was not an exception to the general rule.

Silence, and calmness, and moonlight were still spread over the City of Flowers, while the Marquis pursued the path leading to the suburb of Alla Croce. And the silver-faced stars shone on—shone on, brightly and sweetly, as the young nobleman knocked at the well-protected door of Isaacar ben Solomon.

For a long time his summons remained unanswered; and he repeated it several times ere it received the slightest attention.

At last a casement was opened slowly on the upper story; and the Jew demanded who sought admittance at that hour.

"'Tis I—the Marquis of Orsini!" exclaimed the nobleman.

"A thousand pardons, my lord: I come directly," answered the Jew, not daring to offend a scion of the omnipotent aristocracy of Florence, yet filled with sore misgivings—the more painful because they were so vague and undefined.

In a few moments Manuel was admitted into the abode of Isaacar ben Solomon, who carefully barred and bolted the door again ere he even thought of alleviating his acute suspicion by inquiring the nobleman's business.

"Deign to enter this humble apartment, my lord," said the Jew, at length, as he conducted the Marquis into the same room where he had a few hours previously received the bandit captain.

"Isaacar," exclaimed Manuel, flinging himself upon a seat, "you behold a desperate man before you."

"Alas! my lord—what can a poor, aged, and obscure individual like myself do to assist so great and powerful a noble as your lordship?" said the Jew, in a trembling tone.

"What can you do?" repeated the Marquis: "much—everything, old man! But listen patiently—for a few moments only. A noble lady's fame—honour—reputation are at stake; and I am the guilty—unhappy cause of danger that threatens her. To minister to my necessities, she has pledged her jewels—"

"Yes—yes, my lord—I understand," said Isaacar, trembling from head to foot: "'tis a plan by no means unusual now-a-days in Florence."

"Her husband suspects the fact, and has commanded her to produce the diamonds to-morrow—"

"Her diamonds!" articulated the Jew in a stifling tone.

"Yes—her diamonds," exclaimed Manuel emphatically: "and they are in your possession. Now do you understand me?"

"I—I—my lord—"

"Let us not waste time in idle words, Isaacar," cried the Marquis. "Will you permit this scandal to be discovered, and involve the Countess of Arestino—myself—aye, and yourself, old man, in danger, and perhaps ruin? Perhaps, did I say? Nay—that ruin is certain to fall upon her—certain also to overwhelm you,—for the Count of Arestino is a Councillor of State, and," added Manuel, with slow, measured emphasis, "*the dungeons of the Inquisition open at his commands to receive the Heretic or the Jew!*"

Isaacar ben Solomon vainly endeavoured to reply; fear choked his utterance; and he sank, trembling and faint, upon a low ottoman, where he sat, the picture of dumb despair.

"Ruin, then, awaits the Countess,—ruin, and the Inquisition yawn to engulf you,—and dishonour—the dishonour of having involved that noble lady in such a labyrinth of peril attends upon me," continued Orsini, perceiving that his dark threats had produced the effect which he had desired.

"My lord—my lord," gasped the unfortunate Israelite, who could not close his eyes against the truth—the terrible truth of the prospect submitted to his contemplation.

"It is for you to decide between the ruin of one—two—three persons, yourself being he who will, if possible, suffer most," resumed the Marquis impressively,—"it is, I say, for you to decide between exposure and the Inqui-



sition on one hand, and the surrender of those paltry diamonds on the other!"

"The diamonds—the diamonds—they are gone!" exclaimed the Jew, his voice becoming almost frantic with the wild hope that suddenly struck him of being able to shift the danger from his own head to that of another. "The captain of the banditti—Stephano Verrina—was here a few hours ago,—here, in this very room,—and he sat where your lordship now sits."

"Well—well?" cried the Marquis, impatiently: for his heart began to grow sick with the fear of disappointment in respect to his plan of obtaining the diamonds of his mistress.

"And Stephano Verrina took them from me—basely, vilely wrenched them as it were from my grasp!" continued the Jew.

"'Tis false!—a miserable subterfuge on your part!" ejaculated the Marquis, starting from his seat and striding in a menacing manner towards Isaacchar ben Solomon.

"'Tis true! I will give your lordship the proof!" cried the Jew; and Manuel fell back a few paces. "Stephano came and told me all. He said that the Countess had pledged her jewels for the sake of her lover—of you, my lord—you, the Marquis of Orsini. 'Twas to pay a gambling debt which your lordship had contracted; and that debt was paid within an hour or two from the moment when the sum was advanced on the diamonds. Moreover," continued Isaacchar, still speaking in a rapid, excited tone,—“moreover, Stephano was hired by the Countess to regain them from me!”

"Liar!" thundered the Marquis, again rushing towards the defenceless old man.

"Patience, my lord—patience for an instant;—and you will see that I am no utterer of base falsehoods. The robber-captain examined the diamonds carefully—yes, most carefully; and, while occupied in the scrutiny, he let drop expressions which convinced me that he was hired by the Countess. *'The inventory is complete, he said, 'just as it was described to me by her ladyship. You are a worthy man, Isaacchar,' he added: you will have restored tranquillity to the mind of this beautiful Countess; and she will be enabled to appear at Court to-morrow with her husband.'* Now does your lordship believe me?"

The Marquis was staggered; for several minutes he made no answer. Was it possible that the Countess of Arestino could have employed the dreaded chieftain of the Florentine banditti to wrest her diamonds from the possession of Isaacchar? or had the Jew invented the tale for an obvious purpose? The latter alternative scarcely seemed feasible. How could Isaacchar have learnt that the sum raised was for the payment of a gambling debt? Giulia would not have told him so. Again, how had he learnt that this debt had been paid within an hour or two after the money was procured? and how had he ascertained that the Countess had actually required her diamonds to accompany her husband to Court?

"Perdition!" ejaculated Orsini, bewildered by conflicting ideas, suspicions, and alarms: and he paced the room with agitated steps.

Nearly a quarter of an hour thus elapsed—the silence being occasionally broken by some question which the Marquis put to the Jew, and to which the latter had his reply ready. And each question thus put, and every answer thus given, only served to corroborate Isaacchar's tale, and banish hope still further from the breast of the ruined nobleman.

At length the latter stopped short—hesitated for a few moments, as if wrestling with some idea or scheme that had taken possession of his mind;—then, turning abruptly towards the Jew, he said, in a deep hollow tone, "Isaacchar, I need gold!"

"Gold—gold, my lord!" ejaculated the Jew, all his fears returning: "surely—surely, my lord, her ladyship will supply you with—"

"Fool—dolt!" cried the Marquis, terribly excited: "do you not see that she herself is menaced with ruin—that the villain Stephano must have kept the diamonds for himself! that is, granting your tale to be true—"

At that moment there was an authoritative knock at the house door.

"This is Stephano Verrina himself," exclaimed the Jew: "I know his manner of knocking with the rude handle of his sword. What can he want? what will become of me?"

"Stephano Verrina, say you?" cried the Marquis, hastily. "Then admit him by all means: and the pos-

session of the diamonds of the Countess shall be disputed between him and me at the sword's point."

Manuel d'Orsini was naturally brave; and the desperate position in which he was placed rendered his tone and bearing so resolute—so determined, that Isaacchar feared lest blood should be shed in his dwelling.

"My lord—my lord," he said, in an imploring tone, "depart—or conceal yourself—"

"Silence, signor!" ejaculated the Marquis; "and hasten to admit the Captain of Banditti. I have heard much of Stephano Verrina, and would fain behold this formidable chieftain."

The Jew proceeded, with trembling limbs and ghastly countenance, to obey the orders of the Marquis; and in a few moments he returned to the room, accompanied by Stephano Verrina.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A COMBAT.—THE DESPISED AND PERSECUTED ISRAELITE.

ISAACHAR had taken away the lamp with him to give admission to the bandit, and the Marquis had remained for a few instants in the dark.

When the Jew reappeared, bearing the light, Orsini's first and natural impulse was to cast a rapid, searching glance at the brigand captain. At the same moment this individual burst into a loud, coarse, and joyous laugh; and the Marquis, to his profound surprise, recognised in Stephano Verrina the person with whom he had twice played so unsuccessfully at the gambling-house.

"Good, my lord!" exclaimed Verrina, flinging himself on the ottoman which the Jew had ere now occupied; "there is not in all Florence a man whom I would rather have encountered than yourself."

"You are somewhat pressing for the trifle—the miserable trifle in which I am indebted to you, signor," said the Marquis, haughtily; "seeing that scarce two hours have elapsed since I lost the amount at the casino."

"Pshaw! who alluded to the affair save yourself!" cried Stephano. "It was for another motive—"

"Yes: and I also wished to see Signor Stephano Verrina for another motive," exclaimed Manuel, emphatically.

"Ah! then you know me, my lord," said the bandit. "And yet methought I was a stranger to you—although you were none to me—at the casino?"

"You were a stranger until now," returned Orsini: "but Isaacchar knew by the knock which you dealt so lustily on his door, who was his visitor."

"And your lordship was desirous to see me?"

"Very much so. I believe you expressed a similar wish."

"Precisely, my lord," returned Stephano. "But as you hold the higher rank in the world, precedence in the way of explanation belongs to your lordship."

"It is rather an explanation which I seek than one which I have to give," rejoined Manuel, in a cold but resolute manner. "In a word, my business with thee is touching the diamonds of the Countess of Arestino."

"And my business with your lordship is touching the Countess herself," observed Verrina, also in a cool and deliberate manner.

"Ah!" cried the Marquis, with a sudden start.

"Yes, my lord. But this is no place for explanations on that head," added Stephano, glancing towards the Jew.

"I understand you, signor, we must confer alone," said the Marquis. "We will go out together presently; but in the meantime, one word concerning the diamonds which the Countess of Arestino—"

"Employed me to procure for her," exclaimed Stephano, finishing the nobleman's sentence for him. "I presume that old Isaacchar here has informed you of the particulars of my previous visit to him this night—or rather last night, for it is now the Sabbath morning—"

"I am well informed of those particulars, Sir Captain," returned Manuel; "but I would fain know what has become of the jewels which you obtained from Isaacchar."

"I might with reason question your lordship's right to catechise me—"

"Ah! villain—would you dare?" exclaimed the Marquis, his countenance becoming flushed with rage; for he imagined that the robber-chief was trifling with him.

"Far as you are beneath me—wide as is the gulf that separates the Marquis of Orsini from the proscribed bravo—yet will I condescend to wreak upon thee, base-

born as thou art, that vengeance which the law has not yet been able to inflict!"

And Manuel unsheathed his weapon with such rapidity, that the polished blade of Milan steel flashed like lightning in the glare of the lamp.

"Since that is your object, I will bear with your humour," muttered Stephano, starting from his seat and drawing his heavy sword.

"My lord—good Signor Verrina—in mercy—not here—I implore—" ejaculated the Jew, speaking in a piteous tone, and wringing his hands in alarm at this hostile demonstration.

was made at him by his opponent, and at the next moment wounded the Marquis in the sword-arm.

The weapon fell from Mannel's hand, and he stood at the mercy of his conqueror.

"You are wounded, my lord—and the blood is flowing!" cried Stephano. "Hasten, friend Isaachar—fetch water—bandages—"

"It is nothing—a mere scratch," exclaimed the Marquis, tearing away with his left hand the right sleeve of his doublet, and displaying a tolerable severe gash which run down the fore-arm lengthways, and from which the blood trickled on the floor. "Be kind

"AT THE FOOT OF THE ALTAR KNELT FIVE WOMEN." (See p. 33.)

"Stand back!" thundered the bandit-chief; the Jew retreated into the most remote corner of the room, where he fell upon his knees and began to offer up prayers that no blood might be spilt—for he was a humane and kind-hearted man.

The Marquis and the Captain of Banditti crossed their weapons; and the combat began. The former was lighter, younger, and therefore more active than his opponent: but the latter was far more experienced in the use of his sword; and, moreover, the space was too narrow to enable the Marquis to gain any advantage from his superior agility. The fight lasted for about ten minutes, when the bandit parried a desperate thrust that

enough to bind it with my scarf, Signor Verrina, and let us continue in a more peaceful manner the discourse which has been somewhat rudely interrupted."

Isaachar, however, supplied water in an ewer, and linen bandages: and the old man, forgetting the object of Manuel's predatory visit to his abode, hastened himself to wash and bind up the wounded arm.

"Thou art a good Jew—and hast something of the feelings of the Christian in thee," said the Marquis, when the operation was completed.

"Didst thou ever suppose that different creeds make different hearts, my lord?" asked the old man, in a half-melancholy, half-reproachful tone.

"Isaachar, I shall not forget this kindness on your part," said the Marquis, blushing with shame at himself when he reflected on the purpose for which he had sought the Jew's dwelling. "Heaven knows it is not in my power to reward you with gold; but whenever I may henceforth hear your race traduced, reckon upon me as its champion."

The old man cast a look of gratitude upon the Marquis; and, after some little hesitation, he said in a tremulous tone, "Your lordship hinted ere now—at least methought I understood as much—that you required gold. I take Father Abraham above to witness that I am not so rich as ye Christians deem me to be: but since your lordship can say a kind word of the Jew—I will lend you such sum as you may need—without interest—without bond—"

Orsini, in whose breast all generous feelings had not been entirely crushed by the vices which had proved his ruin, extended his left hand—for his right now hung in a sling—to the kind-hearted Jew, exclaiming, "There is the signor to whom I am indebted, worthy Isaachar: it is for him to say whether he will press me immediately for the sum that I have fairly lost to him with the dice."

"Not I!" ejaculated Stephano, in his blunt, coarse manner. "And therefore your lordship need not lay yourself under an obligation to the Jew, who, after all, is a worthy signor in his way."

"Yes," exclaimed the Marquis, "I shall ever lie under an obligation to him; nor shall I be ashamed to proclaim the fact in the presence of all Florence."

"And now, my lord," resumed Stephano, "I will give you that explanation relative to the diamonds which you might have had without bloodshed; but patience and aristocracy are as much at variance as a thief and the headsmen. Read this paper, my lord: it is not the worst testimonial which I could produce in proof of good character."

And he handed to the Marquis the document which he had purchased the Countess of Arestino to sign.

Manuel read it with astonishment.

"Then she has the diamonds in her possession!" he exclaimed; "and you must have seen her since I was there!"

"My lord," replied Stephano, as he received back the paper, "I was at the Arestino palace ere now, at the same time, and in the same room, as yourself. But this is a mystery I will explain presently. As for the diamonds—Isaachar here can tell your lordship what he has done with the real stones, for those that I received from him and which I handed to her ladyship were false!"

Orsini glanced towards the Jew, who was now pale and trembling.

"It was to make inquiries on this point," continued Stephano, "that I came here on the present occasion. And, to speak truly, it was also with the intention of making the old Israelite disgorge his plunder."

"Plunder!" repeated the Jew, in a tone almost of indignation, in spite of the terror with which the bandit-captain inspired him. "Did I not lend my good golden ducats upon those diamonds? and must I be blamed, if, knowing—ah! knowing too well, the base artifices of which many of even the best-born Florentine nobles and great ladies are capable,—must I be blamed, I say, if, aware of all this, I adopted a device which the wickedness of others, and not our own, has rendered common amongst those of our race who traffic in loans upon jewels and precious stones?"

"Isaachar speaks naught save the pure truth," remarked Orsini, blushing at the justice which dictated these reproaches against that aristocracy whereof he was a member. "Signor Verrina," he continued, "you are a brave man—and I believe you to be a generous one. Confirm this opinion on my part, by refraining from farther molestation towards the Jew; and thou wilt doubly render me thy debtor."

"Be it as you will, my lord," grumbled the bandit-chief. "And now let us depart—for I have much to communicate to your lordship."

"I am ready to accompany you," returned the Marquis, putting on his plumed hat, and settling his cloak with his left hand.

"One word, my lord," said Isaachar, in his habitually nervous and trembling tone: "should the Countess of Arestino really need her diamonds—really need them, my lord—I—I should not object—that is, my lord," he added in a firmer voice, as if ashamed at the hesitation with which he was expressing his readiness to do a good

action,—*"I will at once give them up, trusting to her ladyship's honour to pay me my moneys at her most befitting convenience."*

"Her ladyship does not require them now," exclaimed the bandit-chief, emphatically.

The Marquis looked at Stephano inquiringly; for there was something ominously mysterious in his words: but the brigand stalked in a dogged manner towards the door, as if anxious to hurry the departure so long protracted; and Manuel, having renewed the expressions of his gratitude towards Isaachar ben Solomon, lastly followed Verrina from the house.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### STEPHANO AND THE MARQUIS.—THE STRONGHOLD OF THE BANDITTI.

THE moment Stephano and the Marquis were alone together, in the open street, the former related all the incidents which had occurred at the Arestino palace after the departure of Manuel himself; and the young nobleman now learnt, with feelings of mingled remorse and sorrow, that the unfortunate Countess had been hurried away to the Convent of the Carmelites, that species of Inquisition the gates of which so seldom opened more than once for each new female victim!

"But you promised to save her, signor?" he exclaimed with enthusiastic warmth.

"I gave that pledge, in the manner I have described to your lordship," returned Verrina; "and I shall not swerve from it."

"Think you that her liberation can be effected?" demanded Manuel. "Remember that the Convent is protected by the highest personages in the State,—that violence never will succeed in accomplishing the object—for, should an armed man dare to pass that sacred threshold, every soldier—every shirto in Florence would fly to the spot—"

"It is then your lordship who is afraid of attempting the rescue of the Countess?" interrupted Stephano, in a contemptuous tone.

"That observation is hardly fair, Signor Verrina," said the young nobleman: "considering that my right arm is disabled, and that the wound was received in combat with yourself."

"I crave your lordship's pardon," exclaimed the bandit-captain. "My remark was most uncourteous—particularly to one who has ere now given no equivocal proof of his valour. But I pretend not to courtly manners: and such as I am, you will find me faithfully devoted to your service and to that of the Lady Giulia. The attempt to rescue her will be somewhat hazardous: it is, however, tolerably sure of success. But it can only be undertaken on certain conditions; and these regard your lordship's self. Indeed, had I not so opportunely met you at the Jew's house, I should have sent one of my fellows to you to-morrow."

"In what way do the conditions that you speak of regard myself," inquired the Marquis.

"To this extent," returned the robber-chief; "that you accompany me to our stronghold, wherever it may be—that you join us in any project or plan that may be undertaken with a view to liberate the Countess of Arestino—and that you remain with us until such project or plan be attempted: then, whether it succeed or fail, you shall be at liberty to take your departure."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Manuel: "and now permit me to ask you one question:—On what ground do you manifest this interest in behalf of the Countess and myself? You are well aware that from me you have little to hope in the shape of reward; and that the Countess will be in no better condition than myself to recompense you, even if you should succeed in effecting her rescue."

"I am aware of all this, my lord," answered Stephano; "and I will give you an explanation of my motives as frankly as you solicit it. In the first place, it suits my projects to make friends as much as possible with nobles and great ladies; as no one can say how or when such interest may be available to me or to those connected with me. Secondly, I am not sorry to have an excuse for paying a visit to the Carmelite Convent: and in case of failure, it will be as well to have a Florentine noble amongst us. Because the statutes of our most glorious Republic are somewhat unequal in their application: thus, for instance, if a plebeian commit sacrilege, he is punished with death; but a patrician is merely reprimanded by the Judge and mulcted in a sum which is devoted to religious purposes. In this latter case, too,

the companions of the patrician are punished only as he himself is. Now, therefore, your lordship's presence amongst us will be a guarantee for our safety." Lastly—for I have another and less selfish motive—I admire the spirit with which your lordship spends money, drinks a flagon of good wine, and loses your thousands at dice: for, saving your lordship's presence, there is much in all those feats which finds sympathy with my own inclinations. Thus, everything considered, Stephano Verrina and fifty as gallant fellows as ever wore the name of banditti, are completely at your lordship's service—and at that of the dear lady who has the good taste to prefer a dashing, roystering blade like yourself, to a gentleman no doubt very worthy of esteem, but certainly old enough to be her father."

The Marquis made no reply to this tirade; but he reflected profoundly upon all that the robber-chief had said, as they walked somewhat leisurely along, through the suburb of Alla Croce, and towards the city.

He reflected, because he now saw all the dangers that were associated with the step he was taking;—the chance of being arrested with the whole band of lawless freebooters, and the dishonour that would attach itself to his name were such an event to occur. But on the other hand, Giulia was immured in a terrible prison-house,—immured in consequence of her love for him; and his naturally chivalrous disposition triumphed over selfish considerations. Could her liberation be effected, he would fly with her into another State; and the revenues arising from her own little patrimony, which had been settled on herself at her marriage, would enable them to live comfortably, if not affluently. And who could tell but that her husband might die intestate?—and then all his wealth would become hers by law.

This did he reason with himself.

"Well, my lord—you do not reply?" exclaimed the robber-captain, impatient of the long silence which had followed his explanations. "Are you content to abide by the conditions I have now proposed?"

"Perfectly content," answered the Marquis.

He knew that it was useless to reason with the brigand against that spoliation of the Convent which he had more than hinted at; for it was not likely that the robbers would incur so great a risk as that involved in the sacrilegious invasion of the sacred establishment, unless it were with the hope of reaping an adequate reward.

The bandit-chief and the young nobleman had now reached the boundary of the city; but, instead of entering the streets, they turned abruptly to the right Stephano acting as guide, and plunged into a thick grove of evergreens.

"Here, my lord," said Stephano, stopping short, "you must consent to be blindfolded."

"And wherefore?" demanded Mannel, indignantly. "Think you that I shall betray the secrets of your dwelling, wherever and whatever it may be?"

"I entertain no such base suspicion," returned Verrina. "But we banditti are governed by a code of laws which none of us—not even I, the chief—dare violate. To the observance of this code we are bound by an oath of so deadly—so dreadful, a nature, that bold and reckless as we are, we could not forget that. And I should alike break our laws and depart from my oath, were I to conduct an uninitiated stranger to our stronghold, otherwise than blindfolded."

"I offer no farther opposition, Signor Verrina," said the Marquis. "Fix on the bandage."

Stephano tied his scarf over the nobleman's eyes, and then conducted him slowly through the mazes of the grove.

In this manner they proceeded for nearly a quarter of an hour, when they stopped, and Stephano, quitting Mannel's hand, said in a low tone, "Stand still just where you are for a moment, while I give the signal; and do not move a single step—for it is a dangerous neighbourhood."

About half a minute elapsed, during which it struck Mannel that he heard a bell ring, far, far under ground. The sound was very faint; but still he felt convinced that he did hear it, and that it appeared to come from the bowels of the earth.

But he had not much time for reflection; for Stephano once more took his hand, saying, "You are now about to descend a flight of steps."

They proceeded downward together for some distance, when the steps ceased, and they pursued their way on a flat surface of pavement; but the echoes of their footsteps

convinced the Marquis that he was threading a subterranean cavern or passage.

Presently a huge door, sounding as it were made of iron, was closed behind them; and Stephano exchanged a few words in a whisper with some one who spoke to him at that point. Then they descended a few more steps, and at the bottom another door was banged heavily, when they had passed its threshold,—the echoes rebounding like pistol-shots throughout the place.

For a few minutes more did they proceed on another level paved floor; and then the gurgling rush of a rapid stream met the ears of the Marquis.

"Be careful in following me," said Stephano; "for you are about to cross a narrow bridge, my lord—and one false step is destruction!"

Slowly they passed over the bridge, which seemed to be a single plank of about thirty feet in length, and excessively narrow he had no doubt, both from the caution which he had received and the elasticity of that dangerous pathway.

On the opposite side, the level paved surface was continued; and at the expiration of another minute, heavy folding-doors closed behind them.

"Take off the bandage, my lord," said Stephano, as he untied the knot which fastened the scarf at the back of the young nobleman's head.

The Marquis of Orsini gladly availed himself of this permission; and when the bandage fell from his eyes, he found himself in a spacious cavern, paved with marble, hung with rich tapestry, and lighted by four chandeliers of massive silver.

Six pillars of crystal supported the roof, and rendered the lustre of the chandeliers almost insupportably brilliant by means of reflection.

In the midst of this subterranean apartment, stood a large table, covered with flagons, empty wine flasks, and drinking cups; but the revellers had retired to rest—and the Marquis and Stephano were alone in that banquetting-hall.

"Follow me, my lord," said the bandit-captain; "and I will conduct you to a place where you will find as dainty a couch as even a nobleman so accustomed to luxury as your lordship need not despise."

Thus speaking, Stephano opened an iron door at the end of the hall, and led the way along a narrow and low corridor, lighted by lamps placed in niches at short intervals. At the end of this corridor, he knocked at another door, which was opened in a few moments by a man who had evidently been aroused from his slumber.

"I bring a guest, Lomellino," said Verrina. "See that his lordship be well cared for."

Stephano then retraced his way along the corridor, and Lomellino closed and bolted the iron door.

But no pen can describe the astonishment of the Marquis when he found himself in a spacious room heaped all around with immense riches. Massive plate—splendid chandeliers—gorgeous suits of armour and martial weapons encrusted with gold or set with precious stones—chalices and dishes of silver—bags of money piled in heaps—an immense quantity of jewellery spread upon shelves—and an infinite assortment of the richest wearing apparel,—all these, suddenly bursting on the young nobleman's view by the light of a lamp suspended to the roof, produced an effect at once brilliant and astounding.

When Lomellino addressed him with a request to follow whither he should lead, it seemed as if some rude voice were suddenly awaking him from a delicious dream—save that the cause of his pleasure and wonder was still present. Then ashamed at having allowed himself to be so attracted by the spectacle of boundless wealth around him, he followed Lomellino to an alcove at the farther end of the caverned room, and the entrance of which was covered by a purple velvet curtain, richly fringed with gold.

Within were two beds, having a screen between them. These couches were of the most comfortably description, and such as in those times were not usually seen elsewhere than in the dwellings of the wealthy. Near each bed stood a toilet-table and washing-stand, with ewers of massive silver and towels of fine linen; and to the walls hung two large mirrors—articles of exclusive luxury at that period. The floor was richly carpeted; and a perfumed lamp burnt in front of the dial of a water-clock.

Lomellino respectfully informed the Marquis that one division of the alcove was at his service; and Manuel was too much wearied by the adventures of the evening not to avail himself of the information.

The brigand, seeing that he was wounded, but without asking any questions as to the cause, proffered his aid to divest the Marquis of his upper clothing; and at length the young nobleman was comfortably stretched in one of the voluptuous beds.

Sleep had just closed his eye-lids, and he had even already entered upon a vision of fairy enchantment,—doubtless conjured up to his imagination by the gorgeous spectacle of the treasure-chamber,—when he was startled by screams which appeared to issue from the very wall of the alcove at the head of his bed.

He listened—and those screams became more and more piercing in their nature, although their tone was subdued as if by the existence of a thick intervening partition.

"Holy Virgin! what sounds are those!" he exclaimed, more in pity than in fear—for they were unmistakably female shrieks which he heard.

"Perdition seize on those Carmelite nuns!" cried Lomellino: "they seem to have got another victim!"

"Another victim!" murmured the Marquis, falling back in his bed, a prey to the most torturing feelings: and then his lips framed the sweet and tender name of "GIULIA!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A FEARFUL ACCUSATION.

FAIR and beauteous art thou, O City of Flowers! with thy domes, and spires, and turrets overlooking the Arno's silver stream, and crowding together in that river's classic vale,—surrounded, too, by oak-covered hills, and cypress groves, and gardens of olives and evergreens,—and presenting to the view of the spectator who stands on the rocky summit of Monte Senario, so vast an assemblage of palaces as to justify the saying of Ariosto that it seemed as if the very soil produced them!

Or seen from the olive-owned hills of Fiesole, consecrated by the genius of Milton, how glorious is thy rich combination of beauty, thou Athens of Etruria!

The sun dawned upon the eventful night, the incidents of which have occupied so many chapters. The golden flood poured upon that Florentine scene so fair even in winter,—bathing in yellow lustre the mighty dome of the Cathedral of Saint Mary, the Ducal Palace on its left, and the cupola of the Medicean chapel on its right,—and bringing out into strong relief against the deep foliage of the evergreens, the marble fronts of palaces, villas, and convents, seated amidst the hills or scattered through the vale,—the whole affording a rich and varied view, as if eternal summer reigned in that delightful region, and beneath the purple canopy of that warm Italian sky.

Alas! that the selfish interest—dark passions—conflicting feelings—clashing aims and black, black crimes of men should mar the serenity and peace which ought to maintain an existence congenial to this scene!

Scarcely had the orient beams penetrated through the barred casements of the Jew Isachar's house in the suburb of Alla Croce, when the old man was awakened from a repose to which he had only been able to withdraw a couple of hours previously, by a loud and impatient knocking at his gate.

Starting from his couch, he glanced from the window, and, to his dismay, beheld the Lieutenant of Police, accompanied by half a dozen of his terrible shirri, and by an individual in the plain, sober garb of a citizen.

A cold tremor came over the unhappy Israelite: for he knew that this official visit could bode him no good, and the dread of having incurred the resentment of the Count of Arestino immediately conjured up appalling scenes of dungeons, chains, judgment-halls, and tortures, to his affrighted imagination.

The dark hints which Manuel d'Orsini had dropped relative to the possibility of the Count's discovering the affair of the diamonds, and the certain vengeance that would ensue, flashed to the mind of Isachar ben Solomon; and he stood as it were paralyzed at the window, gazing with the vacancy of despair upon the armed men on whose steel morions and pikes the morning sunbeams now fell in radiant glory.

The knocking was repeated more loudly and with greater impatience than before; and Isachar, suddenly restored to himself, and remembering that it was dangerous as well as useless to delay the admittance of those who would not hesitate to force a speedy entry, huddled on his garments, and descended to the door.

The moment it was opened, the shirri and the citizen

entered; and the Lieutenant, turning shortly round upon the Jew, said, "His Excellency the Count of Arestino demands, through my agency, the restoration of certain diamonds which his lordship has good reason to believe are in your possession. But think not that his lordship is desirous of plundering you of those jewels which you hold as a security for certain moneys advanced: for here is the gold to repay thee."

Thus speaking, the Lieutenant produced from beneath his cloak a heavy bag of gold; and Isachar, now considerably relieved of his apprehensions, led the way into the apartment where he had received the Marquis of Orsini and Stephano de Verrina during the night just past.

"Hast thou heard my message, Israelite?" demanded the Lieutenant.

"Yes—yes; and his lordship is a worthy man—an estimable man. No oppressor of the poor defenceless Jew is he! Would that Florence abounded in such nobles as the Count of Arestino!"

"Cease thy prating, Jew; and let us despatch this business," cried the officer. "You see," he added, glancing towards his men, "that with these at my disposal, the ransacking of your dwelling would be a light and easy matter."

"I will not render it necessary," returned the Jew. "Tarry ye here a few moments, and the diamonds shall be delivered up."

Isachar proceeded into another apartment, the lieutenant following him as far as the passage to see that he did not escape. When the old man returned, he held a small rosewood case in his hand; and from this box he produced the stones which he had extracted from the settings the very day the jewels were first mortgaged to him.

"Now, signor," said the lieutenant, turning to the citizen in the plain, sober garb, "as you are the diamond merchant of whom his lordship, the Count originally purchased the precious stones which have been traced to the possession of Isachar, it is for you to declare whether those be the true diamonds or not."

The citizen examined the stones, and having pronounced them to be the genuine ones, took his departure, his services being no longer required.

The lieutenant secured the rosewood case with its valuable contents about his person, and then proceeded to settle with interest the amount claimed by the Jew as the sum which he had advanced on the jewels.

While this transaction was in progress, the notice of one of the shirri was attracted by the marks of blood which appeared upon the floor, and which, as the reader will recollect, had been caused by the wound that the Marquis of Orsini had received from the robber Stephano.

"It is decidedly blood," whispered one shirri to his companions.

"Not a doubt of it," observed another. "We must mention it to the lieutenant when he has done counting our that gold."

"Do you know what I have heard about the Jews?" asked the first speaker, drawing his comrades still further aside.

"What?" was the general question.

"That they kill Christian children to mix the blood in the dough with which they make the bread used at their religious ceremonies," answered the shirri.

"Depend upon it, Isachar has murdered a Christian child for that purpose!" said one of his companions.

The atrocious idea gained immediate belief amongst the ignorant shirri: and as the Jew now quitted the room for a few minutes to secure the gold which he had just received, in his offer in the adjacent apartment, the police-officers had leisure to point out to their superior the traces of blood which they had noticed, and the suspicion which these marks had engendered.

The lieutenant was not further removed beyond the influence of popular prejudice and ridiculous superstition than even his men; and, though by no means of a cruel disposition, yet he thought it no sin nor injustice to persecute the Hebrew race, even when innocent and unoffending. But now that suspicion—or what he chose to consider suspicion—pointed at Isachar ben Solomon as a dreadful criminal, the lieutenant did not hesitate many moments how to act.

Thus, when the Jew returned to the room with the fond hope of seeing his visitors take their speedy departure, he was met by the terrible words, uttered by the officer of the shirri—"In the name of the Most Holy Question, Isachar, do I make you my prisoner."

The unhappy Jew fell upon his knees, stunned—terrified by this appalling announcement; and although he assumed this attitude of supplication, he had not the power to utter a syllable of intercession nor of prayer. Horror had for the moment stricken him dumb: and a thousand images of terror, conjured up by the fearful words—"THE INQUISITION"—suddenly sprang up to scare, bewilder, and overwhelm him.

"Bind him—gag him!" ejaculated the lieutenant: and this order was immediately obeyed: for whenever a prisoner was about to be conveyed to the dungeon of the inquisition, he was invariably gagged in order that no

was remarkable for the stern and gloomy grandeur of its architecture. Its massive and heavy tower, crowned with embattled and overhanging parapets, seemed to frown in sullen and haughty defiance at the lapse of Time. The first range of windows were twelve feet from the ground, and were grated with enormous bars of iron, producing a sombre and ominous effect. Within were the apartments of the Duke's numerous dependants; and the lower portion of the palace had been rendered thus strong to enable the edifice to withstand a siege in those troublous times when the contentions of the Guelphs and Ghibelines desolated Florence. On the second floor

"FEAR NOT, LADY, YOU SHALL BE SAVED!" (See p. 43.)

questions on his part might evoke answers at all calculated to afford him a clue to the cause of his arrest.

This precaution was originally adopted in reference to those only who were ignorant of the charges laid against them: but it had subsequently become common in all cases of arrests effected in the name, or on the part, of the Holy Brotherhood.

The Palazzo del Podesta, or Ducal Palace, was one of the most celebrated edifices in Florence. In strong contrast with the beautiful specimens of composite Tuscan combined with a well-assimilated portion of the Grecian character, which abounded in Florence, the Ducal Palace

there was in front a plain and simple architrave, and on that storey the windows were high and arched; for those casements belonged to the ducal apartments. The upper storeys were in the same style: but the general aspect was stern and mournful to a degree.

This palace was built—as indeed nearly all the Florentine mansions then were, and still are—in the form of a square; and around this court, which was of an antique and gloomy cast, were numerous monumental stones, whereon were inscribed the names of the nobles and citizens who had held high offices in the State previous to the establishment of the sway of the Medici.

It was beneath the Palazzo del Podesta that the



dungeons of the criminal prison and also those of the Inquisition were situated.

In a cell belonging to the former department, Fernand Wagner was already a captive: and Isaacar ben Solomon now became the inmate of a narrow, cold, and damp stone chamber, in that division of the subterranean which was within the jurisdiction of the Holy Office.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE VISIT OF THE BANDITTI TO THE RIVEROLA PALACE.

It was Monday night—and within an hour of the time appointed by Stephano for the meditated invasion of the Riverola palace.

Francisco had already retired to rest—for he was wearied with vain and ineffectual wanderings about the city and its environs, in search of some trace that might lead him to discover his lost Flora.

Indeed, the few days which had now elapsed since her mysterious disappearance had been passed by the young Count in making every possible inquiry, and adopting every means which imagination could suggest, to obtain a clue to her fate. But all in vain; and never for a moment did he suspect that she might be an inmate of the Carmelite Convent for, although he was well aware of the terrible power wielded by that institution, yet, feeling convinced that Flora herself was incapable of any indiscretion, it never struck him that the wicked machinations of another might place her in the custody of the dreaded Carmelite Abbess.

We said that Francisco had retired to rest somewhat early on the above-mentioned night; and the domestics, yielding to the influence of a soporific which Antonio, the faithless valet, had infused into the wine which it was his province to deal out to them under the superintendence of the head-butler, had also withdrawn to their respective chambers.

Nisida had dismissed her maids shortly before eleven; but she did not seek her couch. There was an expression of wild determination—of firm resolve in her dark black eyes and her compressed lips, which denoted the courage of her dauntless but impetuous mind: for of that mind the large piercing eyes seemed an exact transcript.

Terrible was she in the decision of her masculine—oh! even more than masculine character; for beneath that glorious beauty with which she was arrayed, beat a heart that scarcely knew compunction—or that, at all events, would hesitate at nothing calculated to advance her interests or projects.

Though devoured with ardent passions, and of a temperament naturally voluptuous and sensual even to an extreme, she had hitherto remained chaste, as much for want of opportunity to assuage the cravings of her mad desires, as through a sentiment of pride;—but since she had loved Wagner—the first and only man whom she had ever loved—her warm imagination had excited those desires to such a degree, that she felt capable of making any sacrifice—save one—to secure him to herself!

And that one sacrifice which she could not make, was not her honour:—no—of that she now thought but little in the whirlwind of her impetuous ardent heated imagination. But madly as she loved Fernand Wagner,—that is, loved him after the fashion of her own strange and sensual heart,—she loved her brother still more; and this attachment was at least a pure—a holy sentiment, and a gloriously redeeming trait in the character of this wondrous woman of a mind so darkly terrible.

And for her brother's sake it was that there was one sacrifice—the sacrifice of a tremendous, but painfully persevered in, project—which she would not make even to her love for Fernand Wagner! No—rather would she renounce him for ever—rather would she perish, consumed by the raging desires of her own ungratified passions—than sacrifice one tithe of what she deemed to be her brother's welfare to any such selfish feeling of her own.

Wherefore do we dwell upon this subject now?

Because such was the resolution which Nisida vowed within her own heart, as she stood alone in her chamber, and fixed her eyes upon a document, bearing the Ducal Seal, that lay upon the table.

The document contained the decision of his Highness in respect to the memorial which she had privately forwarded to him in accordance with the advice given her a few days previously by Dr. Duras. The Duke lost no time in vouchsafing a reply: and this reply was unfavourable to the wishes and adverse to the hopes of Nisida. His Highness refused to interfere with the provisions of

the late Count's will; and this decision was represented to be final.

Therefore was it that Nisida solemnly vowed within herself to persevere in a course long ago adopted and ever faithfully—steadily—sternly adhered to since the day of its commencement;—and, as if to confirm herself in the strength of this resolution, she turned her eyes with adoring—worshipping look towards the portrait of her maternal parent,—those eloquent speaking orbs seeming almost to proclaim the words which her lips could not utter,—“Yes, MOTHER—SANTAIED MOTHER! THOU SHALT BE OBEYED!”

Then she hastily secured the ducal missive in an iron box where she was in the habit of keeping her own private papers, and which opened with a secret spring.

But did she, then, mean to renounce her love for Wagner? did she contemplate the terrible alternative of abandoning him in his misfortune—in his dungeon?

No:—far from that! She would save him, if she could;—she would secure him to herself, if such were possible;—but she would not sacrifice to these objects the one grand scheme of her life—that scheme which had formed her character as we now find it, and which made her stand alone as it were amongst the millions of her own sex.

And it was to put into execution the plan which she had devised to effect Wagner's freedom, that she was now arming herself with all the resolution—all the magnanimity—all the firmness of which her masculine soul was capable.

The dial on the mantel in the chamber marked the hour of eleven; and Nisida commenced her preparations.

Having divested herself of her upper garment, she put on a thin but strong, and admirably formed corset, made so as to fit the precise contour of her ample bust, and completely to cover her bosom. Then she assumed a black velvet robe, which reached up to her throat, and entirely concealed the armour beneath. Her long flexible dagger was next thrust carefully into a sheath formed by the wide border of her stomacher; and her preparations for defence in case of peril were finished.

She now took from a cupboard six small bags, which were nevertheless heavy; for they were filled with gold; and these she placed on a table. Then seating herself at that table, she wrote a few lines on several slips of paper; and these she thrust into her bosom.

Having accomplished her arrangements thus far, the Lady Nisida took a lamp in her hand, and quitted her apartments.

Ascending a staircase leading to the upper storey, she paused at one of several doors in a long corridor, and slowly and noiselessly drew the bolt by which that door might be fastened outside.

This was Antonio's room: and thus by Nisida's precaution, was he made a prisoner.

She then retraced her way to the floor below, and proceeded to the apartment in which her father breathed his last, and where the mysterious closet was situate.

No one until now had entered that room since the day of the late Count's funeral; and its appearance was gloomy and mournful in the extreme—not on account of the dark, heavy hangings of the bed, and the drawn curtains of the windows, but also from the effect of the ideas associated with that chamber.

And as Nisida glanced towards the closet-door, even she trembled and her countenance became ashy pale: for not only did she shudder at the thought of the horrors which that closet contained; but through her brain also flashed the dreadful history revealed to her by the manuscript of which, however, only a few lines have as yet been communicated to the reader.

But she knew all—she had read the whole: and well—oh! well might she shudder and turn pale.

For terrible indeed must have been the revelations of a manuscript whereof the few lines above alluded to gave promise of such appalling interest,—those lines which ran thus:—“merciless scalpel hacked and heaved away at the still almost palpitating flesh of the murdered man, in whose breast the dagger remained deeply buried—a ferocious joy—a savage hyena-like triumph—”

But we are to some extent digressing from the thread of our narrative.

Nisida placed the lamp in the chimney, in such a way that its light was concealed so as to leave all the immediate vicinity of the door in a state of complete darkness; and she seated herself in a chair close by, to await the expected events of midnight.

Slowly—slowly passed the intervening twenty minutes:

and the lady had ample leisure to reflect upon all the incidents of her life,—aye, and to shudder too at *one* which had dyed her hand in blood—the blood of Agnes!

Yet, though she shuddered thus—she did not look upon it with that unbounded, tremendous horror, that would be experienced by a lady similarly placed in these times; for jealousy was a feeling that, by the tacit convention of a vitiated society, was an excuse for even murder—and, moreover, she possessed the true Italian heart which deemed the death of a rival in love a justifiable act of vengeance.

But she felt some compunction, because she had learnt, when it was too late, that Agnes was not the mistress of Fernand Wagner; and she was convinced that in affirming this much, he had uttered the strictest truth.

Thus was she rather grieved at the fatal mistake than appalled by the deed itself,—and she shuddered because she knew that her fearful impetuosity of disposition had led to the unnecessary deed which had entailed so dark a suspicion and so much peril upon her lover.

She was in the midst of these and other reflections connected with the various salient features of her life, when the door of the room was slowly and cautiously opened, and a man entered, bearing a lantern in his hand.

Two others followed close behind him.

"Shut the door, Lomellino," said the foremost.

"But are you sure that this is the room?" asked the man thus addressed.

"Certain," was the reply. "Antonio described its situation so clearly—"

"Then why did he not join us?"

"How do I know? But that need not prevent us—"

Nisida at this moment raised the lamp from the fireplace, and the light flashing at that end of the room produced a sudden start and ejaculation on the part of the banditti.

"Perdition!" cried Stephano: "what can this mean."

Nisida advanced towards the robbers in a manner so calm—so dignified—so imperious—and so totally undaunted by their presence, that they were for a moment paralyzed and rooted to the spot as if they were confronted by a spectre.

But at the next instant, Stephano uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and joy, adding, "By my patron saint! Lomellino, this is the very lady of whom I spoke to you the other evening!"

"What! the one who did the business so well—"

"Yes—yes," cried Stephano, hastily: "you know what I mean—in Wagner's garden! But—"

Nisida had in the meantime drawn from her bosom one of the slips of paper before alluded to: and, handing it to the bandit-chief, she made a hasty and imperious motion for him to read it.

He obeyed her with the mechanical submission produced by astonishment and curiosity, mingled with admiration for that bold and daring woman whom he already loved and resolved to win:—but his surprise was increased a hundred-fold, when he perused these lines:—*"I am the Lady Nisida of Riverola. Your design is known to me: it matters not how. Rumour has doubtless told you that I am deaf and dumb: hence this mode of communicating with you. You have been deluded by an idle knave; for there is no treasure in the closet yonder. Even if there had been, I should have removed it the moment your intended predatory visit was made known to me. But you can serve me; and I will reward you well for your present disappointment."*

"What does the paper say?" demanded Lomellino and Piero, the Captain's two companions, almost in the same breath.

"It says just this much," returned Stephano: and he read the writing aloud.

"The Lady Nisida!" ejaculated Lomellino. "Then it is she who used her dagger so well in Wagner's garden."

"Peace, silly fool!" cried Stephano. "You have now let out the secret to Piero. True, 'tis no matter—as he is as staunch to me as you are; and therefore he may as well know that this lady here was the murderess of the young female in Wagner's garden: for I saw her do the deed when I was concealed amongst the evergreens there. She is as much in our power as we are in hers; and we will let her know it if she means any treachery."

"But how could she have discovered that we meant to come here to-night, and what our object was?" asked Piero.

"Antonio must have peached—that's clear!" returned Stephano: "and therefore he did not join us, as he agreed, in the hall down stairs. But no matter. It seems there's gold to be earned in this lady's service; and even if there wasn't, I have such an affection for her, I would cut the throat of the Duke or the Cardinal-Archbishop himself merely to give her pleasure."

Then turning towards Nisida, whose courage seemed partially to have abandoned her—for her countenance was ghastly pale and her hand trembled so that it could scarcely hold the lamp,—Stephano made a low bow, as much as to imply that he was entirely at her service.

Nisida exerted a powerful effort to subdue the emotions that were agitating her: and, advancing towards the door, she made a sign for the banditti to follow her.

She led them to her own suite of apartments, and to the innermost room—her own bed-chamber,—having carefully secured the several doors through which they passed.

The banditti stood round the table, their eyes wandering from the six tempting looking money-bags to the countenance of Nisida, and then back to the little sacks:—but Stephano studied more the countenance than the other object of attraction; for Nisida's face once more expressed firm resolution—and her haughty, imperious, determined aspect, combined with her extraordinary beauty, fired the robber-chief's heart.

Taking from her bosom another slip of paper, she passed it to Stephano, who read its contents aloud for the benefit of his companions:—"The trial of Fernand Wagner will take place this day week. If he be acquitted your services will not be required. If he be condemned, are ye valiant and daring enough (sufficiently numerous ye are—being upwards of fifty in all) to rescue him on his way back from the Judgment Hall to the prison of the Ducal Palace? The six bags of gold now upon the table are yours, as an earnest of reward, if ye assent. Doubt that amount shall be yours, if ye succeed."

"Tis a generous proposition," observed Lomellino.

"But a dangerous one," said Piero.

"Nevertheless, it shall be accepted, if only for her fair self's sake," exclaimed Stephano, completely dazzled by Nisida's surpassing majesty of loveliness;—then, with a low bow, he intimated his readiness to undertake the enterprise.

Nisida handed him a third paper, on which the following lines were written:—"Take the gold with you, as a proof of the confidence I place in you. See that you deceive me not; for I have the power to avenge as well as to reward. On Sunday evening next let one of you meet me, at ten o'clock, near the principal entrance of the Cathedral of Saint Mary; and I will deliver the written instructions of the mode of proceeding which circumstances may render necessary."

"I shall keep this appointment myself," said Stephano to his companions; and another obsequious but somewhat coarse bow denoted full compliance with all that Nisida had required through the medium of the slips of paper.

She made a sign for the banditti to take the bags of gold from the table—an intimation which Piero and Lomellino did not hesitate to obey.

The private staircase leading into the gardens then afforded them the means of an unobserved departure; and Nisida felt rejoiced at the success of her midnight interview with the chiefs of the Florentine Banditti.

### CHAPTER XXX.

FLORA'S CAPTIVITY.—A COMPANION.—THE LIVING TOMB.

Six days had now elapsed since Flora Fracatelli became an inmate of the Carmelite Convent.

During this period she was frequently visited in her cell by Sister Alba, the nun who had received her at the bottom of the pit or well into which she had descended by means of the chair; and that recluse gradually prepared her to fix her mind upon the necessity of embracing a conventual life.

It was not, however, without feelings of the most intense—the most acute—the most bitter anguish, that the unhappy maiden received the announcement that she was to pass the remainder of her existence in that monastic institution.

All the eloquence—all the sophistry—all the persuasion of Sister Alba, who presided over the department of the Penitents, failed to make her believe that such a step was necessary for her eternal salvation.

"No," exclaimed Flora, "the good God has not formed

this earth so fair that mortals should close their eyes upon its beauties. The flowers—the green trees—the smiling pastures—the cypress groves were not intended to be gazed upon from the barred windows of a prison-house.”

Then the nun would reason with her on the necessity of self-denial and self-mortification; and Flora would listen attentively; but if she gave no reply, it was not because she was convinced.

When she was alone in her cell, she sat upon her humble pallet, pondering upon her mournful condition, and sometimes giving way to all the anguish of her heart, or else remaining silent and still in the immovability of dumb despair.

Her suspicions often fell upon the Lady Nisida as the cause of her terrible immurement in that living tomb—especially when she remembered the coldness with which her mistress had treated her a day or two previously to her forced abduction from the Riverola palace. Those suspicions seemed confirmed, too, by the nature of the discourse which Sister Alba had first addressed to her, when she upbraided her with having given way to “those carnal notions—those hopes—those fears—those dreams of happiness, which constitute the passion that the world calls Love.”

The reader will remember that Flora had suspected the coolness of Nisida to have arisen from a knowledge of Francisco's love for the young maiden; and every word which Sister Alba had uttered in allusion to the passion of love seemed to point to that same fact.

Thus was Flora convinced that it was this unfortunate attachment—in which for a moment she had felt herself so supremely blest—that was the source of her misfortunes. But, then, how had Nisida discovered the secret? This was an enigma defying conjecture; for Francisco was too honourable to reveal his love to his sister, after having so earnestly enjoined Flora herself not to betray that secret.

At times a gleam of hope would dawn in upon her soul, even through the massive walls of that living tomb to which she appeared to have been consigned. Would Francisco forget her? Oh! no—she felt certain that he would leave no measure untried to discover her fate—no means unassayed to effect her deliverance.

But, alas! then would come the maddening thought that he might be deceived with regard to her real position,—that the same enemy or enemies who had persecuted her, might invent some specious tale to account for her absence, and deter him from persevering in his inquiring concerning her.

Thus was the unhappy maiden a prey to a thousand conflicting sentiments,—unable to settle her mind upon any conviction save the appalling one which made her feel the stern truth of her captivity.

Oh! to be condemned so young to perpetual prisonage, was indeed hard—too hard,—enough to make reason totter on its throne and paralyze the powers of even the strongest intellect!

Sister Alba had sketched out to her the course of existence on which she must prepare to enter. Ten days of prayer and sorry food in her own cell were first enjoined as a preliminary, to be followed by admission into the number of Penitents who lacerated their naked forms with scourges at the foot of the altar. Then, the period of her penitence in this manner would be determined by the manifestations of contrition which she might evince, and which would be proved by the frequency of her self-flagellation—the severity with which the scourge was applied—and the anxiety which she might express to become a member of the holy sisterhood. When the term of penitence should arrive, the maiden would be removed to the department of the Convent inhabited by the professed nuns; and then her flowing hair would be cut short, and she would enter on her novitiate previously to taking the veil,—that last, last step in the conventual régime which would for ever raise up an insuperable barrier between herself and the great—the beautiful—the glorious world without!

Such was the picture spread for the contemplation of this charming but hapless maiden.

Need we wonder if her glances recoiled from the prospect, as if from some loathsome spectre, or from a hideous serpent preparing to dart from his coils and twine its slimy folds around her?

Nor was the place in which she was a prisoner calculated to dissipate her gloomy reflections.

It seemed a vast cavern hollowed out of the bowels of the earth, rendered solid by masonry, and divided into various compartments. No windows were there to admit

the pure light of day: an artificial lustre, provided by lamps and tapers, prevailed eternally in that earthly purgatory.

Sometimes the stillness of death—the solemn silence of the tomb reigned throughout that place: then the awful tranquillity would be suddenly broken by the dreadful shrieks, the prayers, the lamentations, and the scourges of the Penitents.

The spectacle of these unfortunate creatures,—with their naked forms writhing and bleeding beneath the self-inflicted stripes, which they doubtless rendered as severe possible in order to escape the sooner from that terrible preparation for their novitiate,—this spectacle, we say, was so appalling to the contemplation of Flora, that she seldom quitted her own cell to set foot in the Chamber of Penitence. But there were times when her thoughts became so torturing, and the solitude of her stone-chamber so terrible, that she was compelled to open the door and escape from those painful ideas and that hideous loneliness, even though the scene merely shifted to a reality from which her gentle spirit recoiled in horror and dismay.

But circumstances soon gave her a companion in her cell. For, on the second night of her abode in that place, the noise of the well-known machinery was heard;—the revolution of wheels and the play of the dreadful mechanism raised ominous echoes throughout the subterranean. Another victim came: all the cells were tenanted; and the new-comer was therefore lodged with Flora, whose own grief was partially forgotten—or at all events mitigated—in the truly Christian task of consoling a fellow-sufferer.

Thus it was that the Countess of Arestino and Flora Francatelli became companions in the Carmelite Convent.

At first the wretched Giulia gave way to her despair and refused all comfort. But so gentle—so winning—so softly fascinating were the ways of the beautiful Flora,—and so much sincerity did the charming girl manifest in her attempt to revive that frail but drooping flower which had been thrown as it were at her feet—at the feet of her, a pure though also drooping rosebud of innocence and beauty,—so earnest did the maiden seem in her disinterested attentions, that Giulia yielded to the benign influence, and became comparatively composed.

But mutual confidence,—that outpouring of the soul's heavy secrets which so much alleviates the distress of the female mind,—did not spring up between the Countess and Flora; because the former shrank from revealing the narrative of her frailty—and the latter chose not to impart her love for the young Count of Riverola. Nevertheless, the Countess gave her companion to understand that she had friends without, who were acquainted with the fact of her removal to the Carmelite Convent, and on whose fidelity as well as resolute valour she could reckon;—for the promise made her by the robber-captain, and the idea that the Marquis of Orsini would not leave her to the dreadful fate of eternal seclusion in that place, flashed to her mind when the first access of despair had passed.

Flora was delighted to hear that such a hope animated the Countess of Arestino; and throwing herself at her feet, she said, “Oh! lady, shouldst thou have the power to save me—”

“Thickest thou that I would leave thee here, in this horrible dungeon?” interrupted the Countess, raising Flora from her suppliant position on the cold pavement of the cell, and embracing her. “No: if those on whom I rely fulfil the hope that we have entertained, we shall go forth together. And, oh!” added the Countess, “were all Florence to rise up against this accursed institution—pillage it—sack it—and raze it to the ground, so that not one stone shall remain upon another, heaven could not frown upon the deed! For surely demons in mortal shape must have invented that terrible engine by means of which I was consigned to this subterranean!”

The recollection of the anguish she had suffered during the descent,—a mental agony that Flora could herself fully appreciate, she having passed through the same infernal ordeal,—produced a cold shudder which oscillated throughout Giulia's entire form.

But we shall not dwell upon this portion of our tale; for the reader is about to pass to scenes of so thrilling a nature, that all he has yet read in the preceding chapters are as nothing to the events which will occupy those that are to follow.

We said, then, at the opening of this chapter, that six days had elapsed since Flora became an inmate of the

Convent,—and four since circumstances had given her a companion in the person of Giulia of Arestino.

It was on the sixth night, and the two inmates of the gloomy cell were preparing to retire to their humble pallet, after offering up their prayers to the Virgin,—for adversity had already taught the Countess to pray, and to pray devoutly too,—when they were startled and alarmed by the sudden clang of a large bell fixed in some part of the subterranean.

The echoes which it raised, and the monotonous vibration of the air which it produced, struck terror to their souls.

A minute elapsed—and again the bell struck.

Flora and the Countess exchanged glances of terror and mysterious doubt—so ominous was that sound!

Again a minute passed—and a third time clanged that heavy iron tongue.

Then commenced a funeral hymn, chanted by several female voices, and emanating as yet from a distance,—sounding, too, as if the mournful melody were made within the very bowels of the earth.

But by degrees the strain became louder, as those who sang approached nearer; and in a short time the sounds of many light steps on the stone pavement of the Chamber of Penitence, were heard by Giulia and her companion in their cell.

Again did they exchange terrified glances, as if demanding of each other what this strange interruption of night's silence could mean. But at that instant the hymn ceased—and again the loud bell clanged, as if in some far-off gallery hollowed out of the earth.

Oh! in that convent where all was mysterious, and where a terrific despotism obeyed the dictates of its own wild will, such sounds as that funeral chant and that deafening bell were but too fully calculated to inspire the souls of the innocent Flora and the guilty Giulia with the wildest apprehensions!

Suddenly the door opened; and Sister Alba, who presided over the Chamber of Penitence, appeared on the threshold.

"Come forth, daughters!" she exclaimed: "and behold the punishment due to female frailty."

The Countess of Arestino and Flora Fracatelli mechanically obeyed this command; and a strange—a heartrending sight met their eyes.

The Chamber of Penitence was filled with nuns in their convent-garbs, and the Penitents in a state of seminudity. On one side of the apartment, a huge door with massive bolts and chains stood open, allowing a glimpse, by the glare of the lamps, tapers, and torches, of the interior of a small cell that looked like a sepulchre. Near the entrance to that tomb—for such indeed it was—stood the Lady Abbess; and on the pavement near her knelt a young and beautiful girl, with hands clasped and countenance raised in an agony of soul which no human pen can describe.

The garments of this hapless being had been torn away from her neck and shoulders, doubtless by the force used to drag her thither;—and her suppliant attitude—the despair that was depicted by her appearance—her extreme loveliness—and the wild glaring of her deep blue eyes, gave her the appearance of something unearthly in the glare of that vacillating light.

"No, daughter," said the Abbess, in a cold, stern voice: "there is no mercy for you on earth!"

Then echoed through the Chamber of Penitence a scream—a shriek so wild—so long—so full of agony—that it penetrated to the hearts of Flora, the Countess, and some of the Penitents—although the Abbess and her nuns seemed unmoved by that appalling evidence of female anguish.

At the same instant the bell struck again; and the funeral hymn was re-commenced by the junior recluses.

Sister Alba now approached Flora and the Countess, and said in a low whisper: "The vengeance of the conventional discipline is terrible on those who sin! That miserable girl completed that novitiate five months ago; and the night before she was to take the veil, she escaped. This awful crime she committed for the sake of some man whom she had known ere she first entered the convent, and for whom she thus endangered her immortal soul. But her justly incensed relations yesterday discovered her retreat; and she was restored to this house of penitence and peace. Alas! the effects of her frailty were but too apparent; and that benighted girl would become a mother—*had she long enough to live!*"

These last words were uttered with terrible significance; and the nun turned aside, leaving Flora and the Countess each a prey to the most unspeakable horror.

In the meantime the helpless victim of ecclesiastical vengeance, the poor erring creature, who had dared and sacrificed everything for the love of her seducer,—had risen from her suppliant posture, and flown wildly—madly round to the elderly nuns in succession,—imploping mercy, and rending the very roof of the subterranean with her piercing screams. But those to whom she appealed, turned a deaf ear; for a convent is a tomb in which all human sympathies are immured—a vortex wherein all the best feelings that concrete in the mortal heart are cruelly engulfed!

And while that wretched girl—for she was scarcely yet a woman, although, were life spared her, on the way to maternity—was thus fruitlessly imploring the mercy of hearts that were stern and remorseless, the hymn continued, and the bell tolled at short intervals.

Suddenly, at a particular verse in the funeral chant, the three nuns, who usually did the bidding of the Lady Abbess, glided noiselessly—but surely, like black serpents—towards the victim—seized her in their powerful grasp—and bore her to the cell in which she was to be immured.

The choir of nuns raised their voices, and the bell now clanged quickly with its almost deafening note;—and those human and metallic sounds combined to deaden the screams that burst from the miserable girl, on whom the huge door at length closed with fearful din.

The massive bolts were drawn—the key turned harshly in the lock—and still the shrieks came from within the sepulchre where a human being was entombed alive!

So sickening a sensation came over Flora and the Countess, when the last act of the awful tragedy was thus concluded, that they reeled back to their cell with brains so confused, and such horrible visions floating before their eyes, that their very senses appeared to be abandoning them.

When they were enabled to collect their scattered ideas, and the incidents of the last half-hour assumed a defined shape in their memories, the sounds of hymn and bell had ceased—the Chamber of Penitence was deserted—the silence of death reigned throughout the subterranean—nor did even the faintest shriek or scream emanate from the cell in which the victim was entombed.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE BANDITTI.

THE night of which we are speaking was destined to be one pregnant with alarms for the Countess of Arestino and Signora Fracatelli.

Scarcely had they recovered from the effects of the appalling tragedy which had just been enacted: when their attention was drawn to a strange noise on one side of the cell.

They listened, and the noise continued—resembling an attempt to remove the massive masonry of that part of the stone chamber.

"Merciful heavens!" said Flora in a subdued whisper; "what new terror can now be in store for us?"

But scarcely were those words uttered, when a considerable portion of the masonry fell in with a loud crash; and had not the Countess and Flora already withdrawn to the vicinity of the door, when the mysterious sound first began, they would either have been killed or seriously hurt by the falling of the huge stones.

A faint scream burst from Flora's lips; and she would have rushed from the cell, had not an ejaculation of joy escaped the Countess.

For at the aperture formed by the falling in of the masonry, and by the glare of the light that shone on the other side, as well as by the dim taper that burnt before the crucifix in the cell, Giulia had in an instant recognised the countenance of the Marquis of Orsini.

"Manuel—dearest Manuel!" she exclaimed, rushing towards the aperture; "art thou come to save me?"

"Yes, Giulia," responded the Marquis. "But by what good fortune art thou the very first whom it is my destiny to encounter? and who is thy companion?"

"A good—a generous-hearted girl, whom you must save *also* from this dreadful place," answered the Countess. "And as for this accidental, but most fortunate encounter, I can tell you no more than that this is our cell. It is rather for me to ask—"

"We have no time to waste in idle talk, my lord," said Stephano, who now appeared at the aperture. Pardon my roughness, noble lady, but every moment is precious. Is there any danger of an alarm being given?"

"None, that I am aware of," returned the Countess. "The place where we now are must be a hundred yards below the surface of the earth—"

"No, my lady—that is impossible!" interrupted Stephano; "a hundred feet at the most—and even that is above the mark. But stand back, my lady, while we remove some more of this solid masonry."

Giulia obeyed the robber-chief, and turned to embrace Flora with the liveliest manifestations of joy, which the young maiden sincerely shared—for escape now indeed appeared to be at hand.

The aperture was rapidly enlarged by those who worked on the other side, and in a few minutes it was spacious enough to admit the passage of a human form. Then Giulia and Flora quitted their dismal cell, and entered the innermost chamber of the robbers' hold, but from which the treasures described in a previous chapter had all been removed away.

Giulia embraced the Marquis with grateful affection; but Stephano exclaimed, "Come, my lord! Remember your oath, and join us in this expedition to the end!"

At that moment the awful tragedy of the night flashed back to Flora's memory, from which nothing could have dispelled it even for an instant, save the thrilling excitement attendant on escape from the convent; and, in a few hurried words, she told the dreadful tale.

But what was the astonishment of all present when Piero, one of the banditti, exclaimed, in a tone of mingled rage and grief, "Tis Carlotta! the victim can be none other—the dates you have mentioned, signora, convince me! Yes, five months ago she fled from that accursed convent—and yesterday she disappeared. Ah! my poor Carlotta!"

And the rude but handsome brigand wept.

Flora forgetting the danger of re-entering the walls of the terrible institution exclaimed, "Follow me: it may not be too late—I will show you the cell—"

And she once more passed through the aperture, closely followed by Stephano, Piero, Lomellino, and a dozen other banditti. The Marquis of Orsini stayed behind for a few instants to breathe a re-assuring word to Giulia, whom he left in the treasure-chamber (as that apartment of the robbers' hold was called), and then hastened after those who had penetrated into the subterranean of the Convent.

The party entered the Chamber of Penitence, where the long wax-candles were still burning before the altar; and Flora having hastily given Stephano as much information as she could relative to the geography of the place, that chieftain placed sentinels around. Flora had already pointed out the door of the dungeon to which Carlotta had been consigned; and Piero hastened to call upon his mistress to answer him.

It was a touching spectacle to behold that lawless and bold bad man melting into tenderness beneath the influence of Love!

But no reply came from within that dungeon; and though the bolts were easily drawn back, yet the lock was strong, and the key was not there!

By this time, the Penitents, who slept in the various cells adjoining the Chamber, had become alarmed by the heavy tread and the voices of men, and had opened their doors. But they were desired to keep back by the sentinels, whom Stephano had posted around to maintain order and prevent a premature alarm, but who, nevertheless, gave assurances of speedy escape for those who might choose to profit by the opportunity.

Suddenly a door, which Flora had never noticed before in the Chamber of Penitence, opened, and two recluses, appeared on the threshold.

"The Abbess!" ejaculated Flora, yielding to a sudden impulse of alarm.

But almost at the same instant Stephano sprang forward, caught the Abbess by the arm, and dragged her into the Chamber; then, rushing up a flight of narrow stone steps, with which that door communicated, and which the other recluse had already turned to ascend, he brought her forcibly back also.

This latter nun was Sister Alba, the presiding authority of the Chamber of Penitents.

Her astonishment, as well as that of the Lady Abbess, at the spectacle of a number of armed men in the most private part of the entire establishment, may well be conceived; nor was this disagreeable surprise unmixed with intense alarm.

But they had little time for reflection.

"The key of that door!" cried Stephano, in a fierce and menacing tone, as he pointed towards Carlotta's dungeon.

The Abbess mechanically drew forth the key from beneath her convent-habit; and Piero, rushing forward, caught it eagerly.

In a few minutes it turned in the lock:—the next moment the door stood open.

But what a spectacle met the view of Piero, Flora, and those who were near enough to glance within!

Stretched upon the stone floor of the narrow cell lay the victim motionless and still! Drops of gore hung to her lips: in the agony of her grief she had burst a blood-vessel—and death must have been almost instantaneous.

Flora staggered back sick at the frightful sight: and she would have fallen to the ground, had not the Marquis of Orsini suddenly sprang forward to sustain her.

"This is no place for you, young lady," he said. Permit me to conduct you back to the companionship of the Countess of Arestino."

Flora leant upon his arm; and he half carried rather than led her away from the Chamber of Penitence into the robbers' hold.

But as they passed through the aperture formed by the removal of the masonry, a terrible menace met their ears.

"Vengeance!" cried Piero, furiously; "vengeance on the murderers of Carlotta!"

"Yes—vengeance shalt thou have, comrade," returned the deep, sonorous voice of Stephano.

But scarcely were those words uttered, when the loud clanging of the bell struck up; and the Abbess exclaimed joyfully, "We are saved! we are saved!"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE CHAIR.—THE CATASTROPHE.

THE reader will recollect that when Flora Francatelli was released from the chair at the bottom of the pit or well, Sister Alba had led her along a narrow dark passage communicating with the Chamber of Penitence.

In a small dome-like cavity, hollowed out of the roof of the passage, hung a large bell; and in a cell opening from the side of the passage immediately beneath this dome, dwelt an old nun, who, for some dreadful misdeed committed in her youth, had voluntarily consigned herself to the Convent of Carmelites, and, having passed through the ordeal of the Chamber of Penitence, had accepted the office of sextoness in that department of the establishment.

It was her duty to keep the Chamber of Penitence clean, maintain tapers constantly burning before the altar, supply also the cells of the Penitents themselves with lights, and toll the bell whenever occasion required. She it was who had visited Flora's cell the first night of her arrival at the Convent, to renew the taper that burnt before her crucifix, and to exchange the maiden's attire for the conventual garb.

This old nun it was, then, who suddenly tolled the bell, at the moment when Piero and Stephano were menacing the Abbess and Sister Alba with their vengeance, and when the Marquis of Orsini was bearing away Flora to the robbers' hold, that she might have the companionship of Giulia.

The way in which the old nun rang the bell was such that the inmates of the Convent would perceive it to be an alarm; and, moreover so startling was its sudden clang, that Stephano and Piero abandoned their hold on the Abbess and Sister Alba, and retreated a few paces, uncertain how to act:—hence the joyous exclamation of the Superior of the Convent:—"We are saved! we are saved!"

But little did that stern, imperious woman know of the desperate characters of those with whom she had now to deal. Ashamed of their momentary hesitation, Stephano and Piero rushed on the Abbess and Sister Alba, and dragged them—in spite of their deafening screams—into the fatal cell, where they threw them headlong over the lifeless corpse of their victim.

Scarcely, however, had they closed the door on the wretched women, when the Marquis of Orsini returned; and, too well divining what had passed, he exclaimed, "In the name of heaven, Captain!—by all that is holy, Piero! I implore you not to consummate this dreadful crime!"

"My lord," said Stephano, "ere we entered on this expedition to-night, you bound yourself by an oath to obey me as the leader. I command you, then, not to interfere with our proceedings; but, on the contrary, go and ascertain whence comes the clanging of that infernal bell!"

The Marquis turned aside—sick at heart at the deed of vengeance which was in progress, but unable to remonstrate farther, in consequence of the oath which he had

taken. It was, however, a relief for him to move away from the vicinity of the living tomb, whence emanated the shrieks of the Abbess and the nun; and, guided by the sound of the bell, he rushed—with whirling brain and desperate resolution—into the passage leading from the Chamber of Penitence.

In a few moments the clanging of the bell ceased—for the Marquis had discovered the old sextoness in her cell, and compelled her to desist.

All the events yet recorded in the preceding and the present chapter had occurred with a rapidity which the reader can scarcely comprehend, because their complicated nature and variety have forced us to enter into minute details requiring a considerable time to peruse. Those events which we are now about to describe, also succeeded each other with marvellous speed, and occupied an incredibly short space of time, although our narrative must necessarily appear prolix in comparison.

Extraordinary was the excitement that now prevailed in all the subterranean departments of the Convent. The victims of a stern but just vengeance were sending forth appalling screams from the fatal dungeon: and some of the Penitents in their cells, which were still guarded by the sentinels, were also giving vent to their affright by means of piercing shrieks, though others remained tranquil in hope of the promised release.

Stephano had entirely recovered his presence of mind, and now issued his orders with wondrous rapidity.

Pointing to the door by which the Abbess and Sister Alba had entered the Chamber of Penitence, he said, "Lomellino, this is the way to the upper part of the Convent—there can be no doubt of it! Take Piero and half-a-dozen of the men—and hasten up that staircase. Secure the front gate of the building, and possess yourself of the plate and treasure. But no violence remember—no violence to the nuns!"

Lomellino, Piero, and six of the banditti hastened to obey these commands, while Stephano remained below, to act as circumstances might require. He went the round of the five cells belonging to the Penitents, and enjoined those who were yielding to their terrors to hold their peace, as they had nothing to fear, but much to gain—at least, he observed, if they valued their freedom; and to those who were tranquil, he repeated the assurances of speedy liberation already given by his men.

In the meantime the Marquis of Orsini had, as we before said, discovered the sextoness in her cell, and had recommended her to cease ringing the alarm.

For thirty years the old woman had not seen a being of the male sex; and she was terrified by the appearance of an armed man in that place which she had so long deemed sacred against the possibility of such intrusion.

"Fear nothing," said the Marquis: "no one will harm you. But what will be the effect of that alarm which you have rung?"

"Merely to warn those above that something unusual is taking place below," answered the old woman.

"And by what means can access be obtained to this subterranean?" demanded Manuel.

"There is a staircase leading from the Chamber of Penitence up into the hall of the Convent—"

"Of the existence of that staircase I am aware," interrupted the Marquis, who had seen the Abbess and Sister Alba enter the Chamber of Penitence a few minutes previously, as stated in the preceding chapter; "but are there no other means of ingress or egress?"

"Yes: follow me," said the sextoness, overawed by the authoritative manner in which she was questioned.

Taking up a lamp from the table in her cell, she led the way to the farther end of the passage, threw open a door, and thrusting forth the light beyond the opening, exclaimed in a tone denoting a reminiscence the bitterness of which long years had scarcely mitigated,—"That is the road whereby I came hither; and many—many others have travelled the same downward path."

The Marquis seized the lamp, and beheld, a few paces from him, a wicker chair, to which two ropes, hanging perpendicularly down, were fastened. He raised his eyes, following the direction of the ropes; but as there was now no other light in the pit than the feeble flickering one shed by the lamp which he held, his glances could not penetrate the dense obscurity that prevailed above.

"What means this chair with its two ropes? and for what purpose is this narrow square compartment, the mouth of which is shrouded in darkness?" inquired Manuel.

"That is the method of descent to this region, for all those who come to the Convent either as willing Penitents, or who are sent hither against their inclina-

tion," returned the sextoness. "And though I came a willing Penitent, yet never—never while the breath shall animate this poor weak form, and reason shall remain, can I forget the mental agony—the intense anguish of that fearful descent. Ah! it is a cruel engine of torture, although it tears not the flesh, nor racks the limbs, nor dislocates the joints. And even though thirty long years have passed since I made that dread journey," she continued, glancing upwards,—"thirty years since I last saw the light of day—and though I have since learned and seen how much of the horror of that descent is produced by the delusion of mechanical ingenuity,—yet still I shudder, and my blood runs cold within me."

"To me, old woman," said the Marquis, "your words are an enigma. But you have excited my curiosity: speak quickly, and explain yourself—for I may not linger here."

"Behold this basket," returned the nun, without further preface:—"these ropes connect it with complicated machinery in some chamber adjoining the well itself. In that basket those who are doomed to pass the ordeal of penitence are lowered from an apartment above. This apartment is really but a short distance overhead; but the art of the mechanist has so contrived the four wooden walls of the well, that when the descent of the basket ceases, those walls rise slowly upwards—and thus the descent appears to be continued. Then, when the affrighted female stretches forth her hands wildly, she encounters the ascending walls—and she believes that she is still going down—down—down! Oh! signor—it is most horrible—but a fitting prelude to the terrors of that place!"

And she pointed back, towards the chamber of Penitence.

The Marquis was about to make some observation in reply to the strange disclosures of the old sextoness, when suddenly the din of a tumult, occurring, as it seemed, in that department of the Convent far overhead, reached his ears,—commencing with the rushing of many feet—the ejaculations of hostile hands—and then continuing with the clash of arms—and the shrieks of affrighted women—until, in a few moments, those ominous sounds were broken in upon and dominated by the wild—terrific cry of "Fire, fire!"

"Oh! wherefore have I tarried here so long?" exclaimed the Marquis; and he was about to return to the Chamber of Penitence, when a sudden blaze of light appeared at the mouth of the pit, thirty yards above.

Looking hastily up, he beheld the flames rolling over the entrance of that well at the bottom of which he stood—and, in another minute the forked fire burst from the sides—forcing for itself a way through the wooden walls:—and the old dry timber and planks yielded to the devouring element as if they had been steeped in oil.

But while the Marquis was still standing at the bottom, looking up the pit, the clash of weapons, the tread of many steps, and the vociferations of combatants appeared to grow nearer; and in another moment he became aware that the hostile sounds came down the well, and proceeded from the room far above, where the fire as well as the war was raging.

Manuel had again turned round to hurry back to the Chamber of Penitence, when a loud cry of despair came vibrating down, and in another instant the heavy form of a man was precipitated into the well.

The wicker chair fortunately broke his fall, and he rose with a dreadful imprecation.

"Piero!" cried the Marquis.

"Ah! my lord—is it you?" said the bandit, faintly, as he staggered back and fell heavily on the floor. "This is a bad business—the stirri were alarmed, and broke in—Lomellino has got away—but the rest who were with me are slain—"

"And you are wounded, Piero," ejaculated the Marquis, rushing forward to assist the bandit, from whose breast he now perceived the blood to be flowing.

"Never mind me, my lord!" said Piero faintly, "Haste and tell Verrina that—our men fought well—it was not their fault—nor mine—the nuns must have given the alarm—"

His voice had grown fainter and fainter as he spoke; and, while the Marquis was endeavouring to raise him, he fell back again and expired, with the name of Carlotta upon his tongue.

The combat had ceased above—but the flames had increased in the well to such an extent that the Marquis was compelled to beat a rapid retreat towards the Chamber of Penitence, whither the old sextoness had already fled.



At the entrance of that apartment he met Stephano, who, alarmed by the clashing of arms and the cries of "Fire" that had reached his ears, and which seemed to come from the direction of the passage, was hurrying thither to learn the cause.

In a few words the Marquis informed him of all that had occurred.

"Back to the cavern, my friends!" cried Stephano, in a loud tone: "if the sbirri discover us there, we will resist them to the death!"

And, followed by the Marquis and two or three of his men, the Captain passed through the aperture made from the cell recently occupied by Flora and the Countess, into the treasure-chamber.

But scarcely had those few individuals effected their retreat in this manner, when a tremendous crash was heard—cries and shrieks of horror and dismay burst from those who had not as yet passed through the opening—and then the roof of the Chamber of Penitence and all the adjacent cells gave way with a din as of a thousand cannon,—burying beneath their weight the sextoness, the five Penitents, the inmates of Carlotta's cell, and seven of the banditti.

Those who were in the treasure-chamber felt the ground shake beneath their feet: the sides—although hollowed from the solid rock—appeared to vibrate and groan:—and the aperture leading into the subterranean of the Convent was closed up by the massive masonry that had fallen in.

Flora and Giulia threw themselves into each other's arms, weeping bitterly; for they saw how dearly their freedom had been purchased; and they trembled for the result.

But the Marquis of Orsini, although greatly shocked at the terrible sacrifice of human life which had occurred, exerted himself to console and re-assure the two terrified ladies.\*

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### LOMELLINO'S ESCAPE—STEPHANO'S INTENTIONS.

STEPHANO VERRINA was not the man to allow his energies to be paralysed by the reverse he had just sustained. He immediately commanded a general muster of his men to be held in the banqueting-hall, that he might accurately ascertain the loss his corps had sustained.

Giulia and Flora were left in the treasure-chamber to snatch a few hours' repose, if they could—as it was now much past two o'clock in the morning; and the Marquis accompanied Stephano to the banqueting hall.

Scarcely were the men mustered, when the usual signals announcing the approach of a member of the band were heard; and in a few moments Lomellino appeared amongst the troop.

All crowded round him to hear the account which he had to give of his expedition and its failure.

His tale was soon told. It seemed that on reaching what might properly be termed the main building of the Convent, he found the greatest alarm and confusion prevailing amongst the nuns,—the shrieks of the Abbess, Sister Alba, and the Penitents, and the alarm of the bell having reached the ears of the recluses. Their consternation was increased almost to madness when they suddenly perceived several armed men emerging from the private staircase leading to the subterranean department; and Lomellino found it impossible to tran-

quillize them either by threats or fair speaking. A guard of sbirri must have been passing at the time: for loud knocks resounded at the gate, which the old portress immediately opened before Lomellino or any of his men could interfere to prevent her. A number of police officers rushed in: and then commenced a terrific combat between the banditti and the sbirri, the former of whom were forced into an apartment the door of which was originally locked, but was burst open in the deadly struggle. There the strife was continued; when suddenly the cry of "Fire" arose: and the flames, which had caught a bed in the apartment, spread rapidly to the embrocous and time-worn wood-work that supported the ceiling. How the fire originated, Lomellino knew not; but as some of the nuns carried lamps in their hands, and rushed wildly about in all directions in their terror, it was not very difficult to hazard a conjecture as to the cause of the conflagration. From that apartment, where the fire began, the flames drove the combatants into an inner room; and then Lomellino saw his comrade Piero hurled down some steep place, he himself being too sorely pressed by his assailants to be able to repair to his assistance. At length, seeing that all his companions were slain, Lomellino had fought his way desperately through the police officers, and had succeeded in escaping from the Convent, though closely pursued by three of the sbirri. They were rapidly gaining upon him, when an awful crash suddenly met their ears, as they were hurrying along the street leading to the wood: and, looking back, Lomellino beheld a tremendous pillar of flame shoot up from the place where the Convent had stood, to the very sky—rendering, for the space of a minute, everything as light as day around. The building had fallen in—and heaven only knows how many of the nuns and sbirri had escaped, or how many had perished beneath the ruins! Those officers who were in pursuit of Lomellino, were so astounded by the sudden din and the column of flame, that they remained rooted to the spot where they had turned to gaze on the evidence of the catastrophe: and Lomellino had succeeded in effecting a safe and unobserved return to the stronghold.

This account was particularly welcome to the robbers, inasmuch as it convinced them that the sbirri had no clue to the secret entrance of their stronghold, and that none of their band had been captured in the conflict;—for they would rather hear of the death of their comrades than that they had been taken prisoners; because, were the latter the case, the tortures of the rack or the exhortations of the priest might elicit confessions hostile to the interests of the corps.

Stephano Verrina now proceeded to count his men, who had mustered fifty strong previously to the expedition of that fatal night, which, it was ascertained, had reduced the number to thirty-six,—seven, including Piero, having been slain by the sbirri, and as many having perished by the falling in of the Chamber of Penitence.

The Captain then addressed the troop in the following manner:—

"Worthy comrades,—Our number is sadly reduced; but regrets will not bring back those gallant fellows who are gone. It, therefore, behoves us to attend to our own interest; and, for that purpose I demand your attention for a few minutes. In pursuance of the resolution to which we came the night before last, at the general council that was held, the treasures and possessions amassed during many years of adventure and perils have been fairly divided; and each man's portion has been settled by lot. The fourteen shares that revert to us by the death of our comrades shall be equally subdivided to-morrow, and the superintendence of that duty, my friends, will be the last act of my chieftainship. Yes, brave comrades,—I shall then leave you in accordance with the announcement I made the night before last. It will grieve me to part from you; but you will choose another Captain."

"Lomellino! Lomellino!" exclaimed the banditti with one accord; "he shall succeed our gallant Verrina!"

"And you could not have made a better choice," continued Stephano, "Lomellino will."

"Pardon me, Captain," interrupted the individual thus alluded to; "but is not that little expedition to take place on Monday—in case the lady requires it? We have received her gold as an earnest."

"And double that amount was promised if the affair should turn out successful," added Stephano. "But I have reasons of my own—which you may perhaps understand, Lomellino—for desiring that all idea of that busi-

\* "It was in the early part of February, 1821, that Florence, or, indeed, all Italy, was astounded by the intelligence that a band of robbers, commanded by a noted chief of desperate character, had penetrated into the convent of Carmelites by some subterranean passage known, most probably, only to themselves, and had committed the most unheard-of atrocities. The dual body-guard, however, received timely information of this most sacrilegious invasion into so respectable a sanctuary, and entering the building, encountered the depredators hand to hand. But in the midst of the combat, the Convent was found to be in flames, and so rapidly did the fire rage that in short time the roof fell in, and many nuns, sbirri, and banditti perished. When the ruins were subsequently visited, some strange machinery was discovered, whereof the uses can only be conjectured. Also in a subterranean cell were found the skeletons of a female and a child; and in two other cells, likewise under ground, were found massive chains fastened to rings in the wall."—*Guicciardini*, Vol. II.

ness should be abandoned. And, in order that the band may not be losers by this change of intentions, I will give you from my own share of our long accumulated property——”

“No! no!” cried the banditti enthusiastically; “we will not receive our gallant Stephano’s gold! Let him act according to his own wishes!”

“I thank you, my friends, for this generosity on your part,” said Stephano.

The meeting then broke up; and the robbers sat down to the banqueting-table, to luxuriate in the rich wines with which the stronghold was well stored.

“And therefore I mean to turn honest man,” observed Verrina, also laughing. “In truth, I am not sorry to have found a good excuse to quit a mode of life which the headsman yearns to cut short. Not that I reck for peril; but, methinks, twenty years of danger and adventure ought to be succeeded by a season of tranquillity.”

“Love has a marvellous influence over you, Signor Verrina,” said the Marquis; “for love alone could have inspired such sentiments in your breast.”

“I am fain to confess that your lordship is not far wrong,” returned the bandit. “I have discovered a

“THE FIGHT LASTED FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES.” (See p. 45.)

The Marquis of Orsini was compelled, through fear of giving offence, to share in the festival.

This resolution to abandon the command of your gallant band, is somewhat sudden, meseems, Signor Stephano,” he said: for, not having been present at the council held two nights previously, he was unaware of the Captain’s intention until it was alluded to in that individual’s speech on the present occasion.

“Yes, my lord,” was the reply: “the resolution is sudden. But,” he added, sinking his voice to a whisper, “a certain little blind god is at the bottom of it.”

“Ah! signor, you are in love!” said the Marquis, laughing.

woman who is worthy of me—although she may not consider me to be altogether deserving of her. But of that no matter; for I am not accustomed to consult the inclinations of others when mine own are concerned. And now a word in respect to yourself, my lord. When do you propose to quit this place; for, according to my promise, you are now the master of your actions.”

“The mysterious assault made upon the Convent—the destruction of the entire establishment—and the lives that have been lost, will doubtless create a terrible sensation in Florence,” replied the nobleman; “and should it transpire that I was in any way implicated——”

“That is impossible, my lord,” interrupted Stephano.

"These men whom you behold around you, could alone betray that secret; and you must have seen enough of them—"

"To know that they are stanch and true," added the Marquis. "Yes—on reflection, I perceive that I have nothing to fear; and therefore, with your leave, the Countess, her young companion, and myself will take our departure to-morrow."

"In the evening—when it is dusk," said Stephano. "But your lordship will not remain in Florence?"

"The news which you brought me, a few days ago, of the arrest of that poor Israelite on a ridiculous but most monstrous charge, have affected me strangely," observed Manuel, "and as it is in my power to explain away that charge, I must tarry in Florence the necessary time to accomplish this object. The Count of Arestino will imagine that his wife has perished in the ruins of the Convent; and hence her temporary concealment in the city will be easily effected."

"Well, my lord," said Stephano, "it is not for me to dictate nor advise. But, as I always entertain an esteem for a man with whom I have measured weapons—and as I have somehow formed a liking for your lordship—pardon my boldness. I should recommend you not to remain in Florence on account of the Jew. The Lady Giulia might be discovered by her husband, and you would lose her again. To tell your lordship the truth," he added in a low confidential tone, "a friend of mine, who commands a trading vessel, sails in a few days from Leghorn for the Levant; and I intend to be a passenger on board, in company, I hope, with the sweet lady whom I have honoured with my affections. What says your lordship? will it suit your lordship to embark in that vessel?"

"A thousand thanks, Signor Verrina," replied the Marquis; "but I must remain at Florence to prove the innocence of that poor, persecuted Jew."

Stephano offered no further remonstrance: and the conversation which ensued possessed not the least interest for our readers.

On the following evening the Marquis, Giulia, and Flora quitted the robbers' stronghold—all three carefully blindfolded, and safely conducted amidst the dangers of the egress by Stephano, Lomellino, and another bandit.

When in the grove with which the entrance of the stronghold communicated, the bandages were removed from their eyes, and the two ladies, as well as the Marquis, were once more enabled to rejoice in their freedom.

According to a previous arrangement between them, and in consequence of the intention of the Marquis to remain a few days in Florence, Giulia accompanied Flora to the dwelling of the young maiden's aunt, who was rejoiced to behold the re-appearance of her niece, and who willingly accorded an asylum to the Countess.

The Marquis having conducted the two ladies to the hospitable cottage of this good woman, returned to his own dwelling, his protracted absence from which had caused serious apprehensions amongst the few domestics whom his means permitted him to maintain.

Here we conclude this chapter, we shall observe in a few words that the greatest excitement prevailed in Florence relative to the attack on the Convent and its destruction. Many of the nuns had escaped from the building at the commencement of the fire: and these took up their abode in another institution of the same Order. But the thrilling events which occurred in the Chamber of Penitence did not transpire; nor was it ascertained who were the sacrilegious invaders of the establishment, nor by what means they had obtained an entry.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE ABDUCTION.

It was originally Stephano Verrina's intention to observe good faith with Nisida in respect to the service on which she had intimated her desire to employ him and his band.

But so dazzled was he by her almost supernatural majesty of beauty on that night when he and his companions encountered her in the Riverola palace, that he would have promised, or indeed undertaken, anything calculated to please or benefit her.

When, however, he came to reflect calmly upon the service in which Nisida had enlisted him, he began to suspect that some motive more powerful than the mere desire to effect the liberation of an innocent man, in-

fluenced that lady. Had she not put to death a beautiful creature who had resided in the same dwelling with Fernand Wagner? and did not that deed bear upon its aspect the stamp of an Italian woman's vengeance? Thus thought Stephano; and he soon arrived at the very natural conclusion that Nisida loved Fernand Wagner.

Wagner was therefore his rival; and Verrina did not consider it at all in accordance with his own particular views in respect to Nisida, to aid in effecting that rival's liberation, should he be condemned by the tribunal.

Again Stephano reflected that as Wagner's acquittal was within the range of probability, it would be expedient to possess himself of Nisida *before* the trial took place;—and what opportunity could be more favourable than the one which that lady herself afforded by the appointment she had given him for the Sunday evening at the gate of St. Mary's Cathedral?

All these considerations had determined the bandit to adopt speedy and strenuous measures to possess himself of Nisida, of whom he was so madly enamoured that the hope of gratifying his passion predominated even over the pride and delight he had hitherto experienced in commanding the Florentine robbers.

The appointed evening came; and Stephano, disguised in his black mask, repaired a few minutes before ten to the immediate vicinity of the old Cathedral.

At the corner of an adjacent street, two men, mounted on powerful horses, and holding a third seated by the bridle, were in readiness; and crouched in the black darkness formed by the shade of a huge buttress of the Cathedral, two other members of the troop which Lomellino now commanded, lay concealed; for the new Captain of the Banditti had lent some of his staunchest followers to further the designs of the ex-cliefkain.

A heavy rain had fallen in the early part of the day; but it ceased ere the sun went down; and the stars shone forth like Beauty's eyes when the tears of grief have been wiped away by the lips of the lover.

Stephano paced the arena in front of the sacred edifice; and at length a gentle tread and a rustling of velvet met his ears.

Then, in a few moments, as if emerging from the darkness, the majestic form of Nisida appeared: and when Stephano approached her, she drew aside her veil for an instant—only for a single instant, that he might convince himself of her identity with the lady for whom he was waiting.

But as the light of the silver stars beamed for a moment on the countenance of Nisida, that mild and placid lustre was outvied by the dazzling brilliancy of her large black eyes; and mental excitement had imparted a rich carnation hue to her cheeks, rendering her so surpassingly beautiful, that Stephano could almost have fallen on his knees to worship and adore her!

But, oh! what lovely skins do some snakes wear!—and into what charming shapes does Satan often get!

Nisida had replaced her veil while yet Verrina's eyes were fixed on her bewitching countenance; then, placing her finger lightly upon his arm—oh! how that gentle touch thrilled through him!—she made a sign for him to follow her towards a niche in the deep gateway of the Cathedral; for in that niche was an image of the Madonna, and before it burnt a lamp night and day.

To gain that spot it was necessary to pass the buttress in whose shade the two banditti lay concealed.

Stephano trembled, as he followed that lady, whom he knew to be as intrepid—bold—and desperate as she was beautiful.—He trembled—perhaps for the first time in his life,—because never until now had he felt himself overawed by the majesty of loveliness and the resolute mind of a woman.

But he had gone too far to retreat—even if that temporary and almost unaccountable timidity had prompted him to abandon his present design:—yes—he had gone too far—for at the moment when Nisida was passing, the huge buttress, the two brigands sprang forth; and, though her band had instantly grasped her dagger, yet so suddenly and effectually was she overpowered, that she had not even time to draw it from its sheath.

Fortunately for the scheme of Stephano, the great square in front of the Cathedral was at that moment completely deserted by the usual evening loungers; and thus did he and his companions experience not the slightest interruption as they bore Nisida firmly and rapidly along to the corner of the street where the horses were in attendance.

The lady's hands were already bound—and her dagger had been taken from her; and thus the resistance she was enabled to make was very slight, when Stephano,

having sprung upon one of the horses, received the charming burden from the banditti, and embraced that fine voluptuous form in his powerful arms.

The two men who had waited with Stephano's horse were already mounted on their own, as before stated; and the little party was now in readiness to start.

"No farther commands, signor?" said one of the banditti who had first seized upon Nisida.

"None, my brave fellow. Tell Lomellino that I sent him my best wishes for his prosperity. And now for a rapid journey to Leghorn!"

"Good night, signor."

"Good night. Farewell—farewell, my friends!" cried Verrina: and, clapping spurs to his steed, he struck into a quick gallop, his two mounted companions keeping pace with him, and riding one on either side, so as to prevent any possibility of escape on the part of Donna Nisida of Riverola.

In a few minutes the little party gained the bank of the Arno, along which they pursued their rapid way, lighted by the lovely moon, which now broke forth from the purple sky, and seemed, with its chaste beams playing on the surface of the water, to put a soul into the very river as it ran!

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### WAGNER AND THE TEMPTER—PHANTASMAGORIA.

WHILE Stephano was bearing away the Lady Nisida in the manner described in the preceding chapter, Fernand Wagner was pacing his solitary cell, conjecturing what would be the result of the morrow's trial.

Nisida had visited him a second time on the preceding evening—disguised, as on the former occasion, in male attire; and she had implored him, in the language of the deaf and dumb, but far more eloquently with her speaking eyes and the expression of her beauteous countenance, to allow measures to be that night adopted to effect his immediate escape. But he had resolutely persisted in his original determination to undergo his trial: for, by pursuing this course, he stood the chance of an acquittal; and he knew on the other hand that if he were sentenced to die, the decree of the human tribunal could not be carried into execution. How his escape from that fate (should death be indeed ordained) was to be accomplished was beyond his power of comprehension; but that he possessed a superhuman protector, he knew full well!

Without revealing to Nisida his motives for meeting the criminal judges, he refused to yield to her silently but eloquently pleaded prayer that he would escape should gold induce the jailers to throw open the door of his cell; but he conveyed to her the assurance that the deep interest she manifested in his behalf only bound him the more sincerely and devotedly to her.

During the eight or nine days of his imprisonment, he had reflected deeply upon the murder of Agnes. He naturally associated that black deed with the mystery of the strange lady who had so alarmed Agnes on several occasions; and he had of course been struck by the likeness of his much-loved Nisida to her whom his dead grand-daughter had so minutely described to him. But, if ever suspicion pointed towards Nisida as the murderess of Agnes, he closed his eyes upon the bare idea—he hurled it from him; and he rather fell back upon the satisfactory belief that the entire case was wrapped in a profound mystery, than entertain a thought so injurious to her whom he loved so tenderly.

We said that Nisida had visited him on the Saturday night. She had determined to essay her powers of mute persuasion once more, ere she finally arranged with the banditti for his rescue. But that arrangement was not to take place; for on the Sabbath evening she was carried away, in the manner already described.

And it was now, also, on the Sabbath evening that Wagner was pacing his dungeon,—pondering on the probable result of his trial, and yet never ceasing to think of Nisida.

His memory re-travelled all the windings, and wanderings, and ways which his feet had trodden during a long—long life, and paused to dwell upon that far back hour when he loved the maiden who became the wife of his first period of youth—for he was now in a second period of youth;—and he felt that he did not then love her so devotedly—so tenderly—so passionately as he loved Nisida now.

Suddenly, as he paced his dungeon and pondered on the past as well as on the present, the lamp flickered; and, before he could replenish it with oil, the wick died in its socket.

He had the means of procuring another light; but he cared not to avail himself thereof; and he was about to lay aside his vesture, preparatory to seeking his humble pallet, when he was struck by the appearance of a dim and misty lustre which seemed to emanate from the wall facing the door.

He was not alarmed; he had seen and passed through too much in this world to be readily terrified.—But he stood gazing, with intense curiosity and profound astonishment, upon that phenomenon for which his imagination suggested no natural cause.

Gradually the lustre became more powerful; but in the midst of it there appeared a dark cloud, which by degrees assumed the appearance of a human form;—and in a few minutes Wagner beheld a tall, strange-looking figure standing before him.

But assuredly that was no mortal being; for, apart from the mysterious mode in which he had introduced himself into the dungeon, there was on his countenance so withering—bitter—scornful—sardonic a smile, that never did human face wear so sinister an expression.

And yet this being wore a human shape and was attired in the habiliments of that age,—the long doublet, the tight hose, the trunk breeches, the short cloak, and the laced collar, but his sloeched hat, instead of having a large and gracefully waving plume, was decorated with but a single feather.

Fernand stood with fascinated gaze fixed upon the being whose eyes seemed to glare with subdued lightnings, like those of the basilisk.

There was something awful in that form—something wildly and menacingly sinister in the sardonic smile that curled his lips, as if with ineffable contempt, and with the consciousness of his own power!

"Wagner!" he said, at length breaking silence, and speaking in a deep sonorous voice, which reverberated even in that narrow dungeon like the solemn tone of the organ echoing amidst cloistral roofs; "Wagner, knowest thou who the being is who now addresseth thee?"

"I can conjecture," answered Fernand boldly. "Thou art the Power of Darkness."

"So men call me," returned the Demon, with a scornful laugh. "Yes—I am he whose delight it is to spread desolation over a fertile and beautiful earth—he, whose eternal enmity against Man is the fruitful source of so much evil! But, of all the disciples who have ever yet aided me in my hostile designs on the human race, none was so serviceable as Faust—that Count of Aurnau, whose portrait thou hast so well delineated, and which now graces the wall of thy late dwelling."

"Would that I had never known him!" ejaculated Wagner fervently.

"On the contrary!" resumed the Demon; "thou shouldst be thankful that, in the wild wanderings, of his latter years, he stopped at thy humble cottage in the Black Forest of Germany. Important to thee were the results of that visit—and still more important may they become!"

"Explain thyself, fiend!" said Wagner, nothing dismayed.

"Thou wast tottering with old age—hovering on the brink of the tomb—suspended to a thread which the finger of a child might have snapped," continued the Demon; "and in one short hour thou wast restored to youth, vigour, and beauty."

"And by how dread a penalty was that renovated existence purchased!" exclaimed Wagner.

"Hast thou not been taught by experience that no human happiness can be complete?—that worldly felicity must ever contain within itself some element of misery and distress?" demanded the fiend. "Reflect—and be just! Thou art once more young—and thy tenure of life will last until that age at which thou wouldst have perished, had no superhuman power intervened to grant thee a new lease of existence! Nor is a long life the only boon conferred upon thee hitherto. Boundless wealth is ever at thy command; the floor of this dungeon would be strewn with gold, and jewels, and precious stones at thy bidding—as thou well knowest! Moreover, thou wast ignorant—illiterate—uninformed—now all the sources of knowledge—all the springs of learning—all the fountains of science and art, are at thy disposal, and with whose waters thou canst slake the thirst of thine intellect. Endowed with a youthfulness and a vigour of form that will yield not to the weight of years—that will defy the pressure of time—and that no malady can impair, possessed of wealth having no limit,—and enriched with a mind so stored with knowledge that the greatest sage is as a child in comparison with

thee,—how darest thou complain or repent of the compact which has given to thee all these, though associated with the destiny of a Wehr-Wolf?"

"It is of this fatal—this terrible destiny that I complain and that I repent," answered Wagner. "Still do I admit that the advantages which I have obtained by embracing that destiny, are great—"

"And may be far greater!" added the Demon, impressively. "Handsome, intelligent, and rich—all that thou dost require is Power!"

"Yes," exclaimed Wagner eagerly—and now manifesting, for the first time since the appearance of the fiend in his cell, any particular emotion: "I have need of power!—power to avert those evils into which my sad destiny may plunge me,—power to dominate, instead of being subject to the opinions of mankind,—power to prove my complete innocence of the dreadful crime now imputed to me,—power to maintain an untarnished reputation, to which I cling most lovingly,—power, too," he added in a slower and also a subdued tone,—power to restore the lost faculties of hearing and speech to her whom I love!"

Strange was the smile that curled the Demon's lips, as Wagner breathed these last words.

"You require power—power almost without limit," said the fiend, after a few moments' pause: "and that aim is within your reach. Handsome—intelligent—and rich," he continued, dwelling on each word with marked emphasis, "how happy mayst thou be when possessed of the power to render available, in all their glorious extent, the gifts—the qualities wherewith thou art already endowed! When in the service of Faust—during those eighteen months which expired at the hour of sunset on the 30th July, 1517—"

"Alas!" cried Wagner, his countenance expressing emotions of indescribable horror: "remind me not of that man's fate! Oh; never—never can I forget the mental agony—the profound and soul-felt anguish which he experienced, and which he strove not to conceal, when at the gates of Vienna on that evening he bade me farewell—for ever!"

"But thou wast happy—supremely happy in his service," said the Demon; "and thou didst enjoy a fair opportunity of appreciating the value of the power which he possessed. By his superhuman aid wast thou transported from clime to clime—as rapidly as thought is transfused by lovers' glances; and in that varied bustling, busied life wast thou supremely happy. The people of Europe spoke of that western world, the discovery of which recently rewarded the daring venture of great navigators; and you were desirous to behold that new continent. Your master repeated the wish: and by my invisible agency, ye stood in a few moments in the presence of the Red Men of North America. Again—you accompanied your master to the eternal ice of the northern pole, and from the doorway of the Esquimaux hut ye beheld the wondrous play of the Boreal Lights. On a third occasion, and in obedience to your wish, you stood with your master in the Island of Ceylon, where the first scene that presented itself to your view was an occurrence, which, though terrible, is not uncommon in that reptile infested clime. Afterwards, my power—although its active agency was but partially known to you—transported you and the Count your master—now my victim—to the fantastic and interesting scenes in China,—then to the court of the wife-slaying tyrant of England,—and subsequently to the most sacred privacy of the imperial palace of Constantinople. How varied have been thy travels!—how varied thy movements! And that the scenes which thine eyes did thus contemplate made a profound impression upon thy mind is proved by the pictures now hanging to the walls of thy late dwelling."

"But wherefore this recapitulation of everything I know so well already?" demanded Wagner.

"To remind thee of the advantages of that power which Faust, thy master, possessed, and which ceased to be available to thee when the term of his compact with myself arrived. "Yes," continued the Demon emphatically; "the power which he possessed may be possessed by thee—and thou mayst, with a single word, at once and for ever shake off the trammels of thy present doom—the doom of a Wehr-Wolf!"

"Oh! to shake off those trammels were indeed a boon to be desired!" exclaimed Wagner.

"And to possess the power to gratify thy slightest whim," resumed the Demon,— "to possess the power to transport thyself at will to any clime, however distant,—to be able to defy the machinations of men and the

combinations of adverse circumstances, such as have plunged thee into this dungeon,—to be able, likewise, to say to thy beloved Nisida, '*Receive back the faculties which thou hast lost*—'"

And again was the smile sinister and strange that played upon the lips of the Demon.

But Wagner noticed it not; his imagination was excited by the subtle discourse to which he had lent so ready an ear.

"And hast thou the power," he cried, impatiently, "to render me thus powerful?"

"I have," answered the Demon.

"But the terms—the conditions—the compact?" exclaimed Wagner, in feverish haste, though with forboding apprehension.

"THINE IMMORTAL SOUL!" responded the fiend, in a low but sonorous and horrifying whisper.

"No—no!" shrieked Wagner, covering his face with his hands. "Avaunt, Satan—I defy thee! Ten thousand, thousand times preferable is the doom of the Wehr-Wolf!—appalling even though that be!"

With folded arms and scornful countenance, did the Demon stand gazing upon Wagner, by the light of the supernatural lustre which filled the cell.

"Dost thou doubt my power?" he demanded, in a slow imperious tone. "If so, put it to the test, unbelieving mortal that thou art! But, remember—shouldst thou require evidence of that power which I propose to make available to thee, it must not be to give thee liberty, nor aught that may enhance thine interest."

"And any other evidence thou wilt give me?" cried Wagner interrogatively, a sudden idea striking him.

"Yes," answered the Demon, who doubtless divined his thoughts—for again did a scornful smile play upon his lips. "I will convince thee, by any manifestation thou mayst demand subject to the condition ere now named,—I will convince thee that I am he whose power was placed at the disposal of thy late master, Faust—and by means of which thou wast transported, along with him, to every climate of the earth."

"I will name my wish," said Wagner.

"Speak!" cried the fiend.

"Show me the Lady Nisida as she now is," exclaimed Fernand, his heart beating with the hope of beholding her whom he loved so devotedly; for, with all the jealousy of a lover, was he anxious to convince himself that she was thinking of him.

"Ah! 'tis the same as with Faust and his Theresa," murmured the Demon to himself:—then aloud, he said, "Rather ask me to show thee the Lady Nisida as she will appear four days hence."

"Be it so!" cried Wagner, moved by the strange and mysterious warning which those words appeared to convey.

The Demon then extended his right arm, and chanted in his deep sonorous tones, the following incantation:—

"Ye Powers of Darkness! who obey  
Eternally my potent sway,  
List to thy sovereign master's call!  
Transparent make this dungeon wall;  
And now annihilated be  
The space 'twixt Florence and the sea.  
Let the bright lustre of the morn  
In golden glory steep Leghorn;  
Show where the dancing wailets sport  
Round the gay vessels in the port,—  
Those ships whose gilded lanterns gleam  
In the warm sun's refulgent beam;  
And whose broad pennants kiss the gale  
Woo'd also by the spreading sail!—  
Now let this mortal's vision mark,  
Amidst that scene, the Corsair's bark,  
Clearing the port with swan-like pride;—  
Transparent make the black hull's side,  
And show the curtain'd cabin, where  
Of earth's fair daughters the most fair  
Sits like an image of despair.—  
Mortal, behold! thy Nisida is there!"

The strange phantasmagorian spectacle rapidly developed itself in obedience to the commands of the Demon.

First it appeared to Wagner that the supernal lustre which pervaded the dungeon gathered like a curtain on one side and occupied the place of the wall. This wondrous light became transparent, like a thin golden mist; and then the distant city of Leghorn appeared, producing an effect similar to that of the dissolving views

now familiar to every one. The morning sun shone brightly upon the fair scene; and a forest of masts stood out in bold relief against the western sky. The gilded lanterns on the poops of the vessels—the flags and streamers of various hues—the white sails of those ships that were preparing for sea—and the richly painted pinnaces that were shooting along in the channel between the larger craft, rendered the scene surpassingly gay and beautiful.

But amidst the shipping Wagner's eyes were suddenly attracted by a large galley with three masts—looking most rakish with its snow-white sails, its tapering spars,

foreboding apprehension; but now an ejaculation of mingled rage and grief burst from his lips, when, on a sofa in that cabin, he beheld his love—his dearly loved Nisida, seated “like an image of despair,” motionless and still, as if all the energies of her haughty soul, all the powers of her strong mind, had been suddenly paralysed by the weight of misfortune!

Wagner stood gazing—unable to utter another word beyond that one ejaculation of mingled rage and grief—gazing—gazing, himself a kindred image of despair, upon this mysterious and unaccountable scene.

But gradually the interior of the cabin grew more and

“‘THERE IS NO MERCY FOR YOU ON EARTH.’” (See p. 53.)

its large red streamer, and its low—long and gracefully sweeping hull, which was painted jet black. On its deck were six pieces of brass ordnance; and stands of fire-arms were ranged round the lower part of the masts. Altogether, the appearance of that vessel was as suspicious and menacing as it was gallant and graceful; from the incantation of the Demon, Wagner gleaned its real nature.

And now—as that corsair-ship moved slowly out of the port of Leghorn—its black side suddenly seemed to open, or at least to become transparent; and the interior of a handsomely fitted up cabin was revealed.

Fernand's heart had already sunk within him through

more indistinct, until it was again completely shut in by the black side of the galley, which moved slowly from the mouth of the harbour—her dark hull disappearing by degrees, and melting away in the distance.

Wagner dashed his opened palm against his forehead, exclaiming, “Oh! Nisida—Nisida! who hath torn thee from me!”

And he threw himself upon a seat, where he remained absorbed in a painful reverie, with his face buried in his hands—totally unmindful of the presence of the Demon.

Two or three minutes passed—during which Fernand was deliberating within himself whether he were the sport of a wild and fanciful vision, or whether he had



actually received a warning of the fate which hung over Nisida.

"Art thou satisfied with that proof of my power?" demanded a deep voice, sounding ominously upon his ear.

He raised his head with a spasmodic start—before him stood the Demon, with folded arms and scornful expression of countenance, and, though the phantasmagorian scene had disappeared, the supernatural lustre still pervaded the dungeon.

"Fiend!" cried Wagner, impatiently: "thou hast mocked—thou hast deceived me!"

"Thus do mortals ever speak, even when I give them glimpses of their own eventual fate, through the medium of painful dreams and hideous nightmares," said the Demon, sternly.

"But who has dared—or rather, who will dare—for that vision is a prospective warning of a deed to happen four days hence—who, then, I ask, will dare to carry off the Lady Nisida—my own loved and loving Nisida?" demanded Wagner with increased impatience.

"Stephano Verrina, the formidable Captain of the Florentine Banditti, has this night carried away thy lady-love, Wagner," replied the Demon. "Thou hast yet time to save her: though the steed that bears her to Leghorn be fleet and strong, I can provide thee with a flecter and a stronger. Nay, more—become mine—consent to serve me as Faust served me—and within an hour, within a minute, if thou wilt, Nisida shall be restored to thee—she shall be released from the hands of her captors—thou shalt be free—and thy head shall be pillowed on her bosom, in whatever part of the earth it may suit thee thus to be united to her. Reflect, Wagner—I offer thee a great boon—nay, many great boons—the annihilation of those trammels which bind thee to the destiny of a Wehr-Wolf—power unlimited for the rest of thy days—and the immediate possession of that Nisida whom thou lovest so fondly, and who is so beautiful—so exceedingly beautiful!"

Desperate was the struggle that took place in the breast of Wagner. On one side was all he coveted on earth; on the other was the loss of his immortal soul. Here the possession of Nisida—there her forced abduction by a brigand: here his earthly happiness might be secured at the expense of his eternal welfare—there his eternal welfare must be renounced if he decided in favour of his earthly happiness. What was he to do? Nisida was weighing in the balance against his immortal soul: to have Nisida, he must renounce his God!

Oh! it was maddening—maddening, this bewilderingment.

"An hour—an hour to reflect!" he cried, almost frantically.

"Not a quarter of an hour," returned the Demon.

"Nisida will be lost to you—haste—decide!"

"Leave me—leave me for five minutes only!"

"No—not for a minute. Decide—decide!"

Wagner threw up his arms in the writhings of his ineffable anguish—his right hand came in contact with a crucifix that hung against the wall; and he mechanically clutched it—not with any motive preposse—but wildly, unwittingly.

Terrific was the expression of rage which suddenly distorted the countenance of the Demon; the lightning of ineffable fury seemed to flash from his eyes and play upon his contracting brow;—and yet a strong spasmodic shuddering at the same time convulsed his awful form: for as Wagner clung to the crucifix to prevent himself from falling at the feet of the malignant fiend, the symbol of Christianity was dragged by his weight from the wall—and, as Wagner reeled sideways, the cross which he retained with instinctive tenacity in his grasp waved across the Demon's face.

Then, with a terrific howl of mingled rage and fear, the fiend fell back and disappeared through the earth—as if a second time hurled down in headlong flight before the thunderbolts of heaven.

Wagner fell upon his knees and prayed fervently.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE TRIAL OF FERNAND WAGNER.

On the ensuing morning Wagner stood before the judge of the Criminal Tribunal of the Republic.

The Judgment Hall was a large and lofty room on the Palazzo del Podesta, or Ducal Palace. The judges sat in antique and richly carved chairs, placed on a platform beneath a canopy of purple velvet fringed with gold.

On the left, at a handsome desk covered with papers,

was seated the Procurator Fiscal, or Attorney-General of the Republic, distinguished in attire from the judges only by the fact of the ermine upon his scarlet robe being narrower than theirs. Opposite to this functionary was a bench whereon the witnesses were placed. The prisoner stood between two sbirri in a small pew, or dock, in the centre of the court.

Defendants in civil cases were alone permitted, in that age and country, to retain counsel in their behalf: persons accused of crimes were debared this privilege. Wagner was therefore undefended.

The proceedings of the tribunal were usually conducted privately; but about a dozen gentlemen and twice as many ladies had obtained orders of admission on this occasion, the case having produced a considerable sensation in Florence on account of the reputed wealth of the accused. Perhaps, also, the rumour that he was a young man endowed with extraordinary personal attraction had exercised its influence upon the susceptible hearts of the Florentine ladies. Certain it is that when he was conducted into the Judgment Hall, his strikingly handsome exterior—his air of modest confidence—his graceful gait—and his youthful appearance, so far threw into the background the crime imputed to him, that the ladies present felt their sympathies deeply enlisted in his behalf.

The usher of the tribunal having commanded silence in a loud voice, the Chief Judge began the usual interrogatory of the prisoner.

To the questions addressed to him, the accused replied that his name was Fernand Wagner; that he was a native of Germany; that he had no profession, avocation, nor calling; that he was possessed of a large fortune; and that, having travelled over many parts of the world, he settled in Florence, where he had hoped to enjoy a tranquil and peaceful existence.

"The murdered female was reputed to be your sister," said the Chief Judge. "Was such the fact?"

"She was a near relative," answered Wagner.

"But was she your sister?" demanded the Procurator Fiscal.

"She was not."

"Then in what degree of relationship did she stand towards you?" asked the Chief Judge.

"I must decline a reply to that question."

"The tribunal infers, therefore, that the murdered female was not related to you at all," observed the Judge. "Was she not your mistress?"

"No, my lord!" cried Wagner, emphatically. "As truly as Heaven now hears my assertion, it was not so!"

"Was she your wife?" demanded the Judge.

A negative answer was given.

The Chief Judge and the Procurator Fiscal then by turns questioned and cross-questioned the prisoner in the most subtle manner, to induce him to state the degree of relationship subsisting between himself and Agnes; but he either refused to respond to their queries, or else answered direct ones by means of a positive denial.

The lieutenant of the sbirri was at length called upon to give an account of the discovery of the dead body and the suspicious circumstances which had led to the arrest of Wagner. Two of these circumstances appeared to be very strong against him. The first was the soiled and blood-stained appearance of the garments which were found in his chamber: the other was the exclamation—"But how know you that it is Agnes who is murdered?"—uttered before any one had informed him who had been murdered.

Wagner was called upon for an explanation.

He stated that he had been out the whole night; that the blood upon his garments had flowed from his own body, which had been scratched and torn in the mazes of the woods; that on his return home, he met Agnes in the garden; that he had left her there; and that when he was told a young lady had been assassinated in the vicinity of his dwelling, he immediately conceived that the victim must be Agnes.

When questioned concerning the motives of his absence from home during the entire night, he maintained a profound silence; but he was evidently much agitated and excited by the queries thus put to him.

He said nothing about the stranger-lady who had so frequently terrified Agnes; because, in relating the proceeding of that mysterious female in respect to his deceased grand-daughter—especially the incident of the abstraction of the antique jewels which the late Count of Riverola had given to her—he would have been compelled to enter into details concerning the amour between those who were no more. And this subject he was solicitous to

avoid, not only through respect for the memory of the murdered Agnes, but also to spare the feelings of Count Francisco and Donna Nisida.

The Judge and the Procurator Fiscal, finding that they could elicit nothing from Wagner relative to the cause of his absence from home during the night preceding the murder, passed on to another subject.

"In the apartment belonging to your residence," said the Chief Judge, "there are several pictures and portraits."

Wagner turned pale, and trembled.

The Judge made a signal to an officer of the court; and that functionary quitted the Judgment Hall. In a few minutes he returned, followed by three subordinates bearing the two portraits mentioned in the sixth chapter of this tale, and also the large frame covered over with the large piece of black cloth.

On perceiving this last object, Wagner became paler still, and trembled violently.

"There are six other pictures in the room whence these have been taken," said the Judge: "but those six are not of a character to interest the tribunal. We however, require explanations concerning the two portraits and the frame with the black cloth cover, now before us."

The greatest excitement prevailed amongst the audience.

"On one of the portraits," continued the Chief Judge, "there is an inscription to this effect:—'*F. Count of A. terminated his career on the 1st of August, 1517.*'—What does this inscription mean?"

"It means that Faust, Count of Aunrau, was a nobleman with whom I travelled during a period of eighteen months," replied Wagner; "and he died on the day mentioned in that inscription."

"The world has heard strange reports relative to Faust," said the Chief Judge, in a cold voice and with unchanged manner; although the mention of that name had produced a thrill of horror on the part of his brother-judges and the audience. "Art thou aware that rumour ascribes to him a compact with the Evil One?"

Wagner gazed round him in horrified amazement: for the incident of the preceding night returned with such force to his mind that he could scarcely subdue an agonizing exhalation of emotions.

The Chief Judge next recited the inscription on the other portrait:—"*F. W., January 7th, 1516. His last day thus.*"

But Wagner maintained a profound silence; and neither threats nor entreaties could induce him to give the least explanation concerning the inscription.

"Let us then proceed to examine this frame with the black cloth cover," said the Chief Judge.

"My lord," whispered one of his brother-judges, "in the name of the blessed Virgin! have naught to do with this man. Let him go forth to execution:—he is a monster of atrocity—evidently a murderer—doubtless leagued with the Evil One, as Faust, of whose acquaintance he boasts, was before him—"

"For my part, I credit not such idle tales," interrupted the Chief Judge; "and it is my determination to sift this matter to the very foundation. I am rather inclined to believe that the prisoner is allied with the banditti who infest the Republic, than with any preterhuman power. His absence from home during the entire night, according to his own admission—his immense wealth, without any ostensible resources—all justified my suspicion. Let the case proceed," added the Chief Judge aloud; for he had made the previous observations in a low tone.

"Usher, remove the black cloth from that picture?"

"No! no!" exclaimed Wagner wildly; and he was about to rush from the dock, but the sbirri held him back.

The usher's hand was already on the black cloth.

"I beseech your lordship to pause!" whispered the assistant-judge who had before spoken.

"Proceed!" exclaimed the presiding functionary, in a loud and authoritative tone; for he was a bold and fearless man.

And scarcely were the words uttered, when the black cloth was stripped from the frame; and the usher who had removed the covering, recoiled with a cry of horror, as his eyes obtained a glimpse of the picture which was now revealed to view.

"What means this folly?" ejaculated the Chief Judge. "Bring the picture hither."

The usher, awed by the manner of this great functionary, raised the picture in such a way that the

Judges and the Procurator Fiscal might obtain a full view of it.

"A Wehr-Wolf!" ejaculated the assistant-judge, who had previously remonstrated with his superior; and his countenance became as pale as death.

The dreadful words were echoed by other tongues in the court; and a panic fear seized on all save the Chief Judge and Wagner himself.

The former smiled contemptuously: the latter had summoned all his courage to aid him to pass through this terrible ordeal without confirming by his conduct the dreadful suspicion which had been excited in respect to him.

For, oh! the subject of that picture was indeed awful to contemplate! It had no inscription: but it represented, with the most painful and horrifying fidelity, the writhings and agonizing throes of the human being during the process of transformation into the lupine monster. The countenance of the unhappy man had already elongated into one of savage and brute-like shape; and so admirably had art counterfeited nature, that the rich garments seemed changed into a rough, shaggy, and wiry skin!

The effect produced by that picture was indeed of thrilling and appalling interest?

"A Wehr-Wolf!" had exclaimed one of the assistant-judges; and while the voices of several of the male spectators in the body of the court echoed the words mechanically, the ladies gave vent to screams, as they rushed towards the doors of the tribunal.

In a few moments that part of the court was entirely cleared.

"Prisoner!" exclaimed the Chief Judge, "have you aught more to advance in your defence relative to the charge of murder?"

"My lord, I am innocent!" said Wagner, firmly, but respectfully.

"The Tribunal pronounces you *Gilty*," continued the Chief Judge; then, with a scornful smile towards his assistants, and also to the Procurator Fiscal—who all three, as well as the sbirri and the officers of the court, were pale and trembling with vague fears—the presiding functionary continued thus:—"The Tribunal condemns you, Fernand Wagner, to death by the hand of the common headsman; and it is now my duty to name the day and fix the hour for your execution. Therefore I do ordain that the sentence just pronounced be carried into effect precisely at the hour of sunset on the last day of the present month!"

"My lord! my lord!" exclaimed the Procurator Fiscal; "the belief is that on the last day of each month—and at the hour of sunset—"

"I am aware of the common superstition," interrupted the Chief Judge, coldly and sternly; "and it is to convince the world of the folly of putting faith in such legends that I have fixed that day and that hour in the present instance.—Away with the prisoner to his dungeon!"

And the Chief Judge waved his hand imperiously, to check any further attempt at remonstrance;—but his assistant functionaries, the Procurator Fiscal, and the officers of the court, surveyed him with mingled surprise and awe, uncertain whether they ought to applaud his courage or tremble at his rashness.

Wagner had maintained a calm and dignified demeanour during the latter portion of the proceedings; and, although the sbirri who had charge of him ventured not to lay a finger upon his person, he accompanied them back to the prison of the Palazzo del Podesta.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE SHIPWRECK.

TEN days had elapsed since the incidents related in the preceding chapter.

The scene changes to an island in the Mediterranean Sea.

There, seated on the strand, with garments dripping wet, and with all the silken richness of her raven hair floating wildly and dishevelled over her shoulders—the Lady Nisida gazed vacantly on the ocean, now tinged with living gold by the morning sun.

At a short distance a portion of the shipwrecked vessel lay upon the shore, and seemed to tell her tale.

But where were the desperate, daring crew who had manned that gallant bark? where were those fearless freebooters who six days previously had sailed from Leghorn on their piratical voyage? where were those

who hoisted the flag of peace and assumed the demeanour of honest traders when in port, but who on the broad bosom of the ocean carried the terrors of their black banner far and wide? where, too, was Stephano Verrina, who had so boldly carried off the Lady Nisida?

The gallant bark had struck upon a shoal, during the tempest and the obscurity of the night, and the pilot knew not where they were. His reckoning was lost—his calculations had all been set at naught by the confusion produced by the fearful storm which had assailed the ship and driven her from her course.

The moment the corsair galley struck, that confusion was increased to such an extent that the captain lost all control over his men; the pilot's voice was unheeded likewise.

The crew got out the long-boat, and leapt into it, forcing the captain and the pilot to enter it with them. Stephano Verrina, who was on deck when the vessel struck, rushed down into the cabin appropriated to Nisida, and by signs endeavoured to convey to her a sense of the danger which menaced them. Conquering her ineffable aversion for the bandit, Nisida followed him hastily to the deck. At the same instant that her eyes plunged as it were into the dense obscurity which prevailed around, the lightning streamed in long and vivid flashes over the turbulent waters: and with the roar of the billow suddenly mingled deafening shrieks and cries—shrieks and cries of wild despair, as the long boat, which had been pushed away from the corsair-bark went down at a little distance. And as the lightning played upon the raging sea, Nisida and Verrina caught hurried but frightful glimpses of many human faces, whereon was expressed the indescribable agony of the drowning!

"Perdition!" cried Verrina: "all are gone save Nisida and myself! And shall we too perish ere she has become mine?—shall death separate us ere I have revelled in her charms? Fool that I was to be overawed by her impetuous signs,—or melted by her silent though strong appeals!"

He paced the deck in an excited manner as he uttered these words aloud.

"No! no!" he exclaimed wildly, as the tempest seemed to increase, and the ship was thrown farther on the shoal: "she shall not escape me thus, after all I have done and dared in order to possess her! Our funeral may take place to-night—but our bridal shall be first! Ha! ha!"—and he laughed with a kind of despairing mockery, while the fragments of the vessel's sails flapped against the spars with a din as if some mighty demon were struggling with the blast.

The sense of appalling danger seemed to madden Stephano only because it threatened to separate him for ever from Nisida; and, fearfully excited, he rushed towards her, crying wildly, "You shall be mine! you shall be mine!"

But how terrible was the yell which burst from his lips, when, by the glare of a brilliant flash of lightning, he beheld Nisida cast herself over the side of the vessel!

For a single instant he fell back, appalled—horror-struck: but at the next, he plunged with insensate fury after her.

And the rage of the storm redoubled.

When the misty shades of morning cleared away, and the storm had passed, Nisida was seated alone upon the strand—having miraculously escaped that eternal night of death which leads to no dawn.

But where was Stephano Verrina?

She knew not; although she naturally conjectured, and even hoped, that he was numbered with the dead.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE ISLAND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA.

FAIR and beauteous was that Mediterranean isle whereon the Lady Nisida had been thrown.

When the morning mists had dispersed, and the sunbeams tinged the ridges of the hills and the summits of the tallest trees, Nisida awoke as it were from the profound lethargic reverie in which she had been plunged for upwards of an hour since the moment when the billows had borne her safely to the shore.

The temperature of that island was warm and genial: for there eternal summer reigned; and thus, though

her garments were still dripping wet, Nisida experienced not cold.

She rose from the bank of sand whereon she had been seated, and cast anxious, rapid, and searching glances around her.

Not a human being met her eyes; but in the woods that stretched, with emerald pride, almost down to the golden sands, the birds and insects—Nature's free commoners—sent forth the sounds of life, and welcomed the advent of the morn with that music of the groves.

The scenery which now presented itself to the contemplation of Nisida was indescribably beautiful. Richly wooded hills rose towering above each other with amphitheatrical effect; and behind the verdant panorama were the blue outlines of pinnacles of naked rock.

But not a trace of the presence of human beings was to be seen,—nor a hamlet—nor a cottage—nor the slightest sign of agriculture!

At a short distance lay a portion of the wreck of the corsair-ship. The fury of the tempest of the preceding night had thrown it so high upon the shoal whereon it had struck, and the sea was now comparatively so calm, that Nisida was enabled to approach close up to it.

With little difficulty she succeeded in reaching the deck, that deck whose elastic surface lately vibrated to the tread of many daring, desperate men—but now desolate and broken in many parts.

The cabin which had been allotted to her, or rather to which she had been confined, was in the portion of the wreck that still remained; and there she found a change of raiment, which Stephano had provided ere the vessel left Leghorn. Carefully packing up these garments in as small and portable a compass as possible, she fastened the burden upon her shoulders by means of a cord, and quitting the vessel, conveyed it safe and dry to the shore.

Then she returned again to the wreck in search of provisions, considerable quantities of which she fortunately found to be uninjured by the water; and these she was enabled to transport to the strand by means of several journeys backward and forward between the shore and the wreck.

The occupation was not only necessary, in order to provide the wherewith to sustain life; but it also abstracted her thoughts from a too painful contemplation of her position.

It was long past the hour of noon when she had completed her task; and the shore in the immediate vicinity of the wreck was piled with a miscellaneous assortment of objects,—bags of provisions, weapons of defence, articles of the toilet, clothing, pieces of canvas, cordage, and carpenter's tools.

Then, wearied with her arduous toils, she laid aside her dripping garments, bathed her beauteous form in the sea, and attired herself in dry apparel.

Having partaken of some refreshment, she armed herself with weapons of defence, and, quitting the shore, entered upon the vast amphitheatre of verdure to which we have already slightly alluded.

The woods were thick and tangled; but though, when seen from the shore, they appeared to form one dense uninterrupted forest, yet they in reality only dotted the surface of the island with numerous detached patches of grove and copse; and in the intervals were verdant plains or delicious valleys, exhibiting not the slightest signs of culture, but interspersed with shrubs and trees laden with fruits rich and tempting.

Nature had indeed profusely showered her bounties over that charming isle: for the trees glowed with their blushing or golden produce, as if gems were the fruitage of every bough.

Through one of the delicious valleys which Nisida explored, a streamlet, smooth as a looking-glass, wound its way. To its sunny bank led the lady repair: and the pebbly bed of the river was seen as plainly through the limpid water as an eye-ball through a tear.

Though alone was Nisida in that vale, and though many bitter reflections, deep regrets, and vague apprehensions crowded upon her soul, yet the liveliness of the scene appeared to diminish the intenseness of the feeling of utter solitude, and its soft influence partially lulled the waves of her emotions.

For never had mortal eyes beheld finer fruits upon the trees nor lovelier flowers upon the soil; all life was rejoicing, from the grasshopper at her feet to the feathered songster in the myrtle, citron, and olive groves;—and the swan glided past to the music of the stream.

Above, the heaven was more clear than that of even her own Italian clime,—more blue than any colour that tinges the flowers of the earth.

She roved along the smiling bank which fringed the stream, until the setting sun dyed with the richest purple the rocky pinacles in the distance, and made the streamlet glow like a golden flood.

And Nisida—alone in the radiance and glory of her own charms,—alone, amidst all the radiance and glory of the charms of nature,—the beauteous Nisida appeared to be the Queen of that Mediterranean isle.

But whether it were really an island, or a portion of

Nature appeared to be the undisputed Empress of that land; and Nisida returned to the shore with the conviction that she was the sole human inhabitant of this delicious region.

And now, once more seated upon the strand, while the last beams of the sun played upon the wide blue waters of the Mediterranean, Nisida partook of her frugal repast, consisting of the bread supplied by the wreck and a few fruits which she had gathered in the valley.

The effects of the tempest had totally disappeared in respect to the sea, which now lay stretched in glassy stillness. It seemed as if a holy calm, soft as an infant's

"THERE WAS SOMETHING AWFUL IN THAT FORM." (See p. 59.)

one of the three continents which hem in that tideless ocean, the lady as yet knew not.

Warned by the splendours of the setting sun to retrace her way, she turned and sped back to the strand where the stores she had saved from the wreck were heaped up.

When first she had set out upon her exploring ramble, she had expected every moment to behold human forms—her fellow-creatures—emerge from the woods; but the more she saw of that charming spot, whereon her destinies had thrown her, the fainter grew the hope or the fear—we scarcely know which to term the expectation. For no signs of the presence of man were there:

sleep, lay upon the bosom of the Mediterranean, now no longer terrible with storm, but a mighty emblem of mild majesty and rest.

Nisida thought of the fury which had lately convulsed that sea now so placid, and sighed at the conviction which was forced upon her—that no such calm was for the mortal breast when storms had once been there!

For she pondered on her native land, now, perhaps, far—oh! how far away; and the images of those whom she loved appeared to rise before her,—Francisco, in despair at his sister's unaccountable disappearance—and Fernand perchance already doomed to die!

And tears flowed down her cheeks and trickled upon her snowy bosom, gleaming like dew amongst lilies.

Of what avail was the energy of her character in that land along whose coast stretched the adamantine barrier of the sea?

Oh! it was enough to make even the haughty Nisida weep, and to produce a terrible impression on a mind hitherto acting ever in obedience to its own indomitable will.

Though the sun had set some time, and no moon had yet appeared in the purple sky, yet was it far from dark. An azure mantle of twilight seemed to wrap the earth—the sea—the heavens: and so soft—so overpowering was the influence of the scene and of the night, that slumber gradually stole upon the lady's eyes.

There now, upon the warm sand slept Nisida; and when the chaste advent of the moon bathed all in silver as the sun had for twelve hours steeped all in gold, the beams of the goddess of the night played on her charming countenance without awakening her.

The raven masses of her hair lay upon her flushed cheeks like midnight on a bed of roses; her long black lashes reposed on those cheeks, so surpassingly lovely with their rich carnation hues.

For she dreamt of Fernand; and her vision was a happy one. Imagination played wild tricks with the shipwrecked, lonely lady—as if to recompense her for the waking realities of her sad position. She thought that she was reposing in the delicious valley which she had explored in the afternoon,—she thought that Fernand was her companion—that she lay in his arms—that his lips pressed hers—that she was all to him as he was all to her—and that love's cup of enjoyment was full to the very brim.

But oh! when she slowly awoke, under the influence of the delightful vision, raised her eyes in the dewy light of voluptuous languor to the blue sky above her,—the sunbeams that were heralding in another day, cruelly dispelled the enchanting illusions of a warm and excited fancy; and Nisida found herself alone on the sea-shore of the island.

Thus the glory of that sunrise had no charms for her: although never had the orb of day come forth with greater pomp, nor to shine on a lovelier scene. No words can convey an idea of the rapid development of every feature in the landscape—the deeper and deepening tint glowing sky—the roseate hue of mountain peaks as they stood out against the cloudless orient—and the rich emerald shades of the woods sparkling with fruits.

The fragrant rose and the chaste lily—the blushing peony and the gaudy tulip—end all the choicest flowers of that delicious clime, expanded into renewed loveliness to greet the sun: and the citron and orange, the melon and the grape, the pomegranate and the date drank in the yellow light to nourish their golden hues.

Nisida's eyes glanced rapidly over the vast expanse of waters, and swept the horizon; but there was not a sail nor even a cloud which imagination might transform into the white wing of a distant ship.

And now upon the golden sand the lovely Nisida put off her garments one by one; and set at liberty the dark masses of her shining hair, which floated like an ample veil of raven blackness over the dazzling whiteness of her skin.

Imagination had invested her forehead with a halo, so magnificent was the lustrous effect of the sun upon the silken tresses of that luxuriant hair.

The Mediteranean was the lady's bath; and in spite of the oppressive nature of the waking thoughts which had succeeded her delicious dream,—in spite of that conviction of loneliness which lay like a weight of lead upon her soul, she disported in the waters like a mermaid.

Now she plunged beneath the surface, which glowed in the sun like a vast lake of quicksilver: now she stood in a shallow spot, where the waters rippled no higher than her middle, and combed out her dripping tresses:—then she waded farther in, and seemed to rejoice in allowing the little wavelets to kiss her snowy bosom.

No fear had she—indeed, no thought—of the monsters of the deep: could the fair surface of the shining water conceal aught dangerous or aught terrible?

Oh! yes—even as beneath that snowy breast, beat a heart stained with crime, often agitated by the most ardent and impetuous passions and devoured by raging desires!

For nearly an hour did Nisida disport in Nature's mighty bath, until the heat of the sun became so intense that she was compelled to return to the shore and resume her apparel.

Then she took some bread in her hand, and hastened to the groves to pluck the cooling and delicious fruits whereof there was so marvellous an abundance.

She seated herself on a bed of wild flowers, on the shady side of a citron and orange grove, and surrounded by a perfumed air. Before her stretched the valley, like a vast carpet of bright green velvet fantastically embroidered with flowers of a thousand varied hues. And in the midst meandered the crystal stream, with stately swans and an infinite number of other aquatic birds floating on its bosom.

And the birds of the groves, too, how beautiful were they, and how joyous did they seem! What variegated plumage did they display, as they flew past the Lady Nisida, unscared by her presence! Some of them alighted from the overhanging boughs, and as they descended swept her very hair with their wings: then, almost as if to convince her that she was no unwelcome intruder in that charming land, they hopped round her, picking up the crumbs of bread which she scattered about to attract them.

For the loneliness of her condition had already attuned the mind of this strange being to a susceptibility of deriving amusement from incidents which a short time previously she would have looked upon as the most inane triflings;—thus was the heaviness of her thoughts relieved by disporting in the water, as we are now saw her, or by contemplating the playfulness of the birds.

Presently she wandered into the vale, and gathered a magnificent nosegay of flowers: then the whim struck her that she would weave herself a chaplet of roses; and as her work progressed she improved upon it, and fashioned a beauteous diadem of flowers to protect her head from the scorching noon-day sun.

But, think not, O reader! that while thus diverting herself with trivialities of which you would scarcely have deemed the haughty—imperious—active disposition of Nisida of Riverola to be capable,—think not that her mind was altogether abstracted from unpleasant thoughts. No—far, very far from that! She was merely relieved from a portion of that weight which oppressed her; but the entire burden could not be removed from her soul.

There were moments when her grief amounted almost to despair. Was she doomed to pass the remainder of her existence in that land? was it really an island, and unknown to navigators? She feared so: for did it join a continent, its loveliness and fruitfulness would not have permitted it to remain long unoccupied by those who must of necessity discover it.

And oh! what would her brother think of her absence? what would Fernand conjecture? And what perils might not at that moment envelope her lover, while she was not near to succour him by means of her artifice, her machinations, or her gold?

Ten thousand—thousand maledictions upon Stephano, who was the cause of all her present misery! Ten thousand—thousand maledictions on her own folly for not having exerted all her energies and all her faculties to escape from his power, ere she was conveyed on board the corsair-ship and it was too late!

But useless now were regrets and repinings; for the past could not be recalled, and the future might have much happiness in store for Nisida.

For oh! sweetest comes the hope which is lured back because its preference is indispensable, and oppressed as Nisida was with the weight of her misfortunes, her soul was too energetic—too sanguine, and too impetuous to yield to despair.

Day after day passed; and still not a ship appeared.

Nisida did not penetrate much farther into the island than the valley which we have described, and whither she was accustomed to repair to gather the flowers that she wove into diadems. She lingered for the most part near the shore on which she had been thrown, fearful lest, should she remain long away, a ship might pass in her absence.

Each day she bathed her beauteous form in the Mediteranean; each day she devoted some little time to the adornment of her person with wreaths of flowers. She wove crowns for her head—necklaces—bracelets—and scarfs,—combining the flowers so as to form the most wild and fanciful devices, and occasionally surveying herself in the natural mirror afforded her by the limpid stream.

Properly wearing an attire as scanty as possible, on account of the oppressive heat which prevailed during each day of twelve long hours, and which was not materially moderated at night, she supplied to some extent

the place of the superfluous garments thus thrown aside, by means of tissues of cool, refreshing, fragrant flowers.

Thus, by the time she had been ten or twelve days upon the island, her appearance seemed most admirably to correspond with her new and lonely mode of life, and the spot where her destinies had cast her. Habited in a single linen garment, confined round the slender waist with a cestus of flowers,—and with light slippers upon her feet,—but with a diadem of roses on her head, and with wreaths round her bare arms, and her equally bare ankles,—she appeared to be the goddess of that island—the genius of that charming clime of fruits, and verdure, and crystal streams, and flowers.

The majesty of her beauty was softened, and thus enhanced by the wonderful simplicity of her attire; the dazzling brilliancy of her charms was subdued by the chaste—the innocent—the primitive aspect with which those fantastically woven flowers invested her. Even the extraordinary lustre of her fine dark eyes was moderated by the gaudy yet elegant assemblage of hues formed by those flowers which she wore.

Was it not strange that she, whose soul we have hitherto seen bent on deeds or schemes of stern and important nature,—who never acted without a motive, and whose mind was far too deeply occupied with worldly pursuits and cares to bestow a thought on trifles,—who, indeed, would have despised herself had she wasted a moment in toying with a flower, or watching the motions of a bird,—was it not strange that Nisida should have become so changed as we now find her in that island of which she was the queen?

Conceive that same Nisida who planned dark plots against Flora Francatelli, now tripping along the banks of the sun-lit stream, bedecked with flowers and playing with the swans. Imagine that same being, who dealt death to Agnes, now seated beneath the shade of myrtles and embowering vines, distributing bread or pomegranate seeds to the birds that hopped cheerfully around her. Picture to yourself that woman of majestic beauty, whom you have seen clad in black velvet and wearing a dark thick veil, now weaving for herself garments of flowers, and wandering in the lightest possible attire by the sea shore, or by the rippling stream, or amidst the mazes of the fruit-laden groves.

And, sometimes, as she sat upon the yellow sand, gazing upon the wavelets of the Mediterranean, that were racing one after another, like living things from some far-off region, to that lovely but lonely isle, it would seem as if all the low and sweet voices of the sea—never loud and sullen now, since the night of the storm which cast her on that strand—were heard by her, and made delicious music to her ears!

In that island must we leave her now for a short space—leave her to her birds, her flowers, and her mermaid sports in the sea,—leave her also to her intervals of dark and dismal thoughts, and to her long but ineffectual watchings for the appearance of a sail in the horizon!

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE WEHR-WOLF.

It was the last day of the month; and the hour of sunset was approaching.

Great was the sensation that prevailed throughout the city of Florence.

Rumour had industriously spread, and with equal assiduity exaggerated, the particulars of Fernand Wagner's trial—and the belief that a man, on whom the horrible destiny of a Wehr-Wolf had been entailed, was about to suffer the extreme penalty of the law, was generally prevalent.

The great square of the ducal palace, where the scaffold was erected, was crowded with the Florentine populace; and the windows were literally alive with human faces.

Various were the emotions and feelings which influenced that mass of spectators. The credulous and superstitious—forming more than nine-tenths of the whole multitude—shook their heads, and commented amongst themselves in subdued whispers, on the profane rashness of the Chief Judge who dared to doubt the existence of such a being as a Wehr-Wolf. The few who shared the scepticism of the Judge, applauded that high functionary for his courage in venturing so bold a stroke in order to destroy what they deemed to be an idle superstition.

But the great mass were dominated by a profound and

induced most painful sensation of awe: curiosity induced them to remain, though their misgivings prompted them to fly from the spot which had been fixed upon for the execution. The flowers of Florentine loveliness—and never in any age did the Republic boast of so much female beauty—were present; but bright eyes flashed forth uneasy glances, and snowy bosoms beat with alarms, and fair hands trembled in the lovers' pressure.

In the midst of the square was raised a high platform covered with black cloth, and presenting an appearance so ominous and sinister that it was but little calculated to revive the spirits of the timid. On this scaffold was a huge block; and near the block stood the headsmen, carelessly leaning on his axe, the steel of which was polished and bright as silver.

A few minutes before the hour of sunset, the Chief Judge, the Procurator Fiscal, the two Assistant-Judges, and the Menteenan of sbirri, attended by a turnkey and several subordinate police-officers, were repairing in procession along the corridor leading to the doomed prisoner's cell.

The Chief Judge alone was dignified in manner; and he alone wore a demeanour denoting resolution, and at the same time complete self-possession. Those who accompanied him were, without a single exception, a prey to the most lively fear; and it was evident that had they dared to absent themselves, they would not have been present on this occasion.

At length the door of the prisoner's cell was reached—and there the procession paused.

"The moment is now at hand," said the Chief Judge, "when a monstrous and ridiculous superstition—imported into our country from that cradle and nurse of preposterous legends, Germany—shall be annihilated for ever. This knave who is about to suffer, has doubtless propagated the report of his lupine destiny in order to inspire terror, and thus prosecute his career of crime and infamy with the greater security from chances of molestation. For this end he painted the picture which appalled so many of you in the Judgment Hall, but which, believe me, my friends, he did not always believe destined to retain its sable covering. Well did he know that the curiosity of a servant or of a friend would obtain a peep beneath the mystic veil; and he calculated that the terror with which he sought to invest himself, would be enhanced by the rumours and representations spread abroad by those who thus penetrated into his feigned secrets. But let us not waste that time which now verges towards a crisis whereby doubt shall be dispelled and a ridiculous superstition destroyed for ever."

At this moment a loud—a piercing—and an agonizing cry burst from the interior of the cell.

"The knave has overheard me, and would fain strike terror to your hearts!" exclaimed the Chief Judge; then, in a still louder tone, he commanded the turnkey to open the door of the dungeon.

But when the man approached, so strange—so awful—so appalling were the sounds which came from the interior of the cell, that he threw down the key in dismay, and rushed from the dreaded vicinity.

"My lord, I implore you to pause!" said the Procurator Fiscal, trembling from head to foot.

"Would you have me render myself ridiculous in the eyes of all Florence?" demanded the Chief Judge, sternly.

Yet, so strange were now the noises which came from the interior of the dungeon—so piercing the cries of agony—so violent the rustling and tossing on the stone-floor, that for the first time this bold functionary entertained a partial misgiving, as if he had indeed gone too far.

But to retreat was impossible: and, with desperate resolution, the Chief Judge picked up the key, and thrust it into the lock.

His assistants, the Procurator Fiscal, and the sbirri, drew back with instinctive horror, as the bolts groaned in the iron work which held them: the chain fell with a dismal, clanking sound; and as the door was opened, a horrible monster burst forth from the dungeon with a terrific howl.

Yells and cries of despair reverberated through the long corridor; and those sounds were for an instant broken by that of the falling of a heavy body.

'Twas the Chief Judge—hurled down and dashed violently against the rough, uneven masonry, by the mad career of the Wehr-Wolf as the monster burst from his cell.

On—on he sped, with the velocity of lightning, along



the corridor—giving vent to howls of the most horrifying description.

Fainting with terror, the Assistant-Judges, the Procurator Fiscal, and the shirri, were for a few moments so overcome by the appalling scene they had just witnessed, that they thought not of raising the Chief Judge, who lay motionless on the pavement. But at length some of the police-officers so far recovered themselves as to be able to devote attention to that high functionary:—it was however too late—his skull was fractured by the violence with which he had been dashed against the wall—and his brains scattered on the pavement.

Those who now bent over his disfigured corpse exchanged looks of unutterable horror.

In the meantime, the Wehr-Wolf had cleared the corridor—rapid as an arrow shot from the bow—he sprang bounding up a flight of steep stone stairs as if the elastic air bore him on—and rushing through an open door, burst suddenly upon the crowd that was so anxiously waiting to behold the procession issue thence!

Terrific was the yell that the multitude sent forth,—a yell formed of a thousand combining voices,—so long—so loud—so wildly agonising, that never had the welkin rung with so appalling an ebullition of human misery before!

Madly rushed the wolf amidst the people—dashing them aside—overturning them—hurling them down—bursting through the mass too dense to clear a passage of its own accord—and making the scene of horror more horrible still by mingling his hideous howlings with the cries—the shrieks—the screams that escaped from a thousand tongues.

No pen can describe the awful scene of confusion and death which now took place. Swayed by no panic fear, but influenced by terrors of dreadful reality, the people exerted all their force to escape from that spot; and thus the struggling—crushing—pushing—crowding—fighting—and all the oscillations of a multitude set in motion by the direst alarms, were succeeded by the most fatal results. Women were thrown down and trampled to death—strong men were scarcely able to maintain their footing—females were literally suffocated in the pressure of the crowd—and mothers with young children in their arms excited no sympathy.

Never was the selfishness of human nature more strikingly displayed than on this occasion: no one bestowed a thought upon his neighbour—the chivalrous Florentine citizen dashed aside the weak and helpless female who barred his way, with as little remorse as if she were not a being of flesh and blood—and even husbands forgot their wives, lovers abandoned their mistresses, and parents waited not an instant to succour their daughters.

Oh! it was a terrible thing to contemplate—that dense mass, oscillating furiously like the waves of the sea—sending up to heaven such appalling sounds of misery,—rushing furiously towards the avenues of egress,—falling back, baffled and crushed, in the struggle where only the very strongest prevailed,—labouring to escape from death, and fighting for life,—fluctuating, and rushing, and wailing in maddening excitement, like a raging ocean,—oh! all this wrought a direful sublimity, with those cries of agony and that riot of desperation!

And all this while the wolf pursued its furious career, amid the mortal violence of a people thrown into horrible disorder, pursued its way with savage howls, glaring eyes, and foaming mouth—the only living being there that was infuriate and not alarmed—battling for escape, and yet unhurt!

As a whirlpool suddenly assails the gallant ship—makes her agitate and rock fearfully for a few moments, and then swallows her up altogether,—so was the scaffold in the midst of the square shaken to its very basis for a little space, and then hurled down—disappearing altogether amidst the living vortex.

In the balconies and at the windows overlooking the square the awful excitement spread like wild-fire; and a real panic prevailed amongst those who were at least beyond the reach of danger. But horror paralyzed the power of sober reflection; and the hideous spectacle of volumes of human beings battling—and roaring—and rushing—and yelling in terrific frenzy, produced a kindred effect, and spread the wild delirium amongst the spectators at those balconies and those windows.

At length, in the square below, the crowds began to pour forth from the gates,—for the Wehr-Wolf had by this time cleared himself a passage, and escaped from the midst of that living ocean so fearfully agitated by the storms of fear.

But even when the means of egress were thus obtained, the most frightful disorder prevailed—the people rolling in heaps upon heaps,—while infuriate and agile men ran on the tops of the compact masses, and leapt in their delirium as if with barbarous intent.

On—on sped the Wehr-Wolf, dashing like a whirlwind through the streets leading to the open country—the white flakes of foam flying from his mouth like spray from the prow of a vessel,—and every fibre of his frame vibrating as if in agony.

And oh! what dismay—what terror did that monster spread in the thoroughfares through which he passed; how wildly,—how madly flew the men and women from his path—how piteously screamed the children at the house-doors in the poor neighbourhoods!

But as if sated with the destruction already wrought in the great square of the palace, the wolf dealt death no more in the precincts of the city:—as if lashed on by invisible demons, his aim—or his instinct was to escape.

The streets are threaded—the suburbs of the city are passed—the open country is gained; and now along the bank of the Arno rushes the monster—by the margin of that pure stream to whose enchanting vale the soft twilight lends a more delicious charm.

On the verge of a grove, with its full budding branches all impatient for the Spring, a lover and his mistress were murmuring fond language to each other. In the soft twilight blushed the maiden, less in bashfulness than in her own soul's emotion,—her countenance displaying all the magic beauty not only of feature but of feeling; and she raised her large blue eyes in the d. wy light of a sweet enthusiasm to the skies, as the handsome youth by her side pressed her fair hand and said, "We must now part until to-morrow, darling of my soul! How calmly has this day, with all its life and brightness, passed away into the vast tomb of eternity! It is gone without leaving a regret on our minds,—gone, too, without clouds in the heavens or mists upon the earth—most beautiful even at the moment of its parting. To-morrow, beloved one, will unite us again in your parents' cot—and renewed happiness—"

The youth stopped—and the maiden clung to him in speechless terror; for an ominous sound, as of a rushing animal—and then a terrific howl, burst upon their ears.

No time had they for flight—not a moment even to collect their scattered thoughts.

The infuriate wolf came bounding over the green sward: the youth uttered a wild and fearful cry—a scream of agony burst from the lips of the maiden as she was dashed from her lover's arms—and in another moment the monster had swept by.

But what misery—what desolation had his passage wrought. Though unhurt by his glistening fangs—though unwounded by his sharp claws,—yet the maiden—an instant before so enchanting in her beauty, so happy in her love—lay stretched on the cold turf, the chords of life snapped suddenly by that transition from perfect bliss to the most appalling terror!

And still the wolf rushed madly—wildly on.

It was an hour past sunrise; and from a grove in the immediate neighbourhood of Leghorn, a man came forth.

His countenance, though wondrously handsome, was deadly pale,—traces of mental horror and anguish remained on those classically chiselled features and in those fine, eloquent eyes.

His garments were soiled, blood-stained, and torn.

This man was Fernand Wagner.

He entered the city of Leghorn, and purchased a change of attire, for which he paid from a purse well filled with gold. He then repaired to a hostel, or public tavern, where he performed the duties of the toilette, and obtained the refreshment of which he appeared to stand so much in need.

By this time his countenance was again composed; and the change which new attire and copious ablution had made in his appearance, was so great that no one who had seen him issue from the grove and beheld him now, would have believed in the identity of person.

Quitting the hostel, he repaired to the port, where he instituted inquiries relative to a particular vessel which he described, and which had sailed from Leghorn upwards of a fortnight previously.

He soon obtained the information which he sought; and an old sailor, to whom he had addressed himself, not only hinted that the vessel in question was suspected,

when in the harbour, to be of piratical character, but also declared that he himself had seen a lady conveyed on board during the night preceding the departure of the ship. Farther inquiries convinced Wagner that the lady spoken of had been carried by force, and against her will, to the corsair-vessel; and he was now certain that the Demon had not deceived him,—that he had indeed obtained a trace of his lost Nisida!

His mind was immediately resolved how to act; and his measures were as speedily taken.

Guided by the advice of the old sailor from whom he had gleaned the information he sought, he was enabled to purchase a fine vessel and equip her for sea within the space of a few days. He lavished his gold with no niggard hand—and gold is a wondrous talisman to remove obstacles and facilitate human designs.

In a word, on the sixth morning after his arrival at Leghorn, Fernand Wagner embarked on board his ship, which was manned with a gallant crew, and carried ten pieces of ordnance.

A favouring breeze prevailed at the time; and the gallant bark set sail for the Levant.

## CHAPTER XL.

### WAGNER IN SEARCH OF NISIDA.

THE reader may perhaps be surprised that Fernand Wagner should have been venturesome enough to entrust himself to the possibilities of a protracted voyage, since every month his form must undergo a frightful change—a destiny which he naturally endeavoured to shroud in the profoundest secrecy.

But it must be recollected that the Mediterranean is dotted with numerous islands; and he knew that, however changeable or adverse the winds might be, it would always prove an easy matter to make such arrangements as to enable him to gain some port a few days previously to the close of the month.

Moreover, so strong—so intense was his love for Nisida, that, even without the prospect afforded by this calculation, he would have dared all perils—incurred all risks—opposed himself to all hostile chances, rather than have remained inactive while he believed her to be in the power of a desperate—ruthless bandit.

For, oh! ever present to his mind was the image of the lost fair one;—by day, when the sun lighted up with smiles the dancing waves over which his vessel bounded merrily—merrily; and by night, when the moon shone like a silver lamp amidst the curtains of heaven's pavilion.

His was not the love which knows only passionate impulses; it was a constant, unvarying—tender sentiment; far—far more pure, and therefore more permanent, than the ardent and burning love which Nisida felt for him. His was not the love which possession could satiate and enjoyment cool down: it was a feeling that had gained a soft, yet irresistible empire over his heart.

And this love of his was nurtured and sustained by the most generous thoughts. He pictured to himself the happiness he should experience in becoming the constant companion of one whose loss of hearing and of speech cut her off as it were from that communion with the world which is so grateful to her sex:—he imagined to himself, with all the fond idolatry of sincere affection, how melodiously soft—how tremulously clear would be her voice, were it restored to her, and were it first used to articulate the delicious language of love. And then he thought how enchanting—how fascinating—how fraught with witching charms would be the conversation of a being endowed with so glorious an intellect,—were she able to employ the faculty of speech.

Thus did her very imperfections constitute a ravishing theme for his meditations; and the more he indulged in dreams like these, the more resolute did he become never to rest until he had discovered and reasoned her.

Seven days had elapsed since the ship sailed from Leghorn; and Sicily had already been passed by, when the heavens grew overclouded, and everything portended a storm.

The captain, whom Wagner had placed in charge of his vessel, adopted all the precautions necessary to encounter the approaching tempest; and soon after the sun went down on the seventh night, a hurricane swept the surface of the Mediterranean.

The ship bent to the fury of the gust—her very yards were deep in the water. But when the rage of that dreadful squall subsided, the gallant bark righted again, and bounded triumphantly over the foaming waves.

A night profoundly dark set in; but the white crests of the billows were visible through that dense obscurity; while the tempest rapidly increased in violence, and all the dread voices of the storm—the thunder in the heavens, the roaring of the sea, and the gushing sounds of the gale—proclaimed the fierceness of the elemental war.

The wind blew not with that steadiness which the skill of the sailor and the capacity of the noble ship were competent to meet; but in long and frequent gusts of intermittent fury.

Now rose the gallant bark on the waves, as if towering towards the starless sky in the utter blackness of which the masts were lost: then it sank down into the abyss, the foam of the boiling billows glistening far above, on all sides amidst the obscurity.

What strange and appalling noises are heard on board a ship labouring in a storm,—the cracking of timbers—the creaking of elastic planks—the rattling of the cordage—the flapping of fragments of sails—the falling of spars—the rolling of casks, got loose—at times a tremendous crash throughout the vessel, as if the whole frame-work were giving way and the very sides collapsing!

And amidst those various noises and the dread sounds of the storm, the voices of the sailors were heard,—not in prayer nor subdued by terror, but echoing the orders issued by the captain, who did not despair of guiding—nay, fighting, as it were, the ship through the tumultuous billows and against the terrific blast.

Again a tremendous hurricane swept over the deep: it passed—but not a spar remained to the dismantled bark. The tapering masts—the long graceful yards were gone, the cordage having snapped at every point where its support was needed,—snapped by the fury of the tempest as it wantonly cut by a sharp knife.

The boats, the crew's last alternative of hope—had likewise disappeared.

The ship was now completely at the mercy of the wild raging of the winds and the fury of the troubled waters: it no longer obeyed its helm—and there were twenty men separated, all save one, from death only by a few planks and a few nails!

The sea now broke so frequently over the vessel, that the pumps could scarcely keep her afloat: and at length while it was yet dark, though verging towards the dawn, the sailors abandoned their task of working at those pumps. Vainly did the captain endeavour to exercise his authority—vainly did Wagner hold out menaces and promises by turns—death seemed imminent—and yet these men, who felt that they were hovering on the verge of destruction, flew madly to the wine-stores.

Then commenced a scene of the wildest disorder amidst those desperate men; and even the captain himself, perceiving that they could laugh and shout—and sing in the delirium of intoxication, rushed from the side of Wagner, and joined the rest.

It was dreadful to hear the obscene jests—the ribald song—and the reckless execration sent forth from the cabin, as if in answer to the awful voices in which Nature was then speaking to the world.

But scarcely had a faint—faint gleam appeared in the orient sky,—not quite a gleam, but a mitigation of the intenseness of the night,—when a tremendous wave—a colossus amongst giants—broke over the ill-fated ship—while a terrible crash of timbers was for a moment heard in unison with the appalling din of the welming billows.

Wagner was the only soul on deck at that instant; but the fury of the waters tore him away from the bulwark to which he had been clinging—and he became insensible.

When he awoke from the stupor into which he had been plunged, it was still dusk, and the roar of the ocean sounded in his ears with deafening din.

But he was on land—though where he knew not.

Rising from the sand on which he had been cast, he beheld the billows breaking on the shore at the distance of only a few paces; and he retreated farther from their reach.

Then he sat down, with his face towards the east, anxiously awaiting the appearance of the morn, that he might ascertain the nature and the aspect of the land on which he had been cast.

By degrees the glimmering which had already subdued the blackness of night into the less profound obscurity

of duskiness, grew stronger; and a yellow lustre, as of a far-distant conflagration, seemed to struggle against a thick fog. Then a faint roseate streak tinged the eastern horizon—growing gradually deeper in hue, and spreading higher and wider—the harbinger of sunrise; while, simultaneously, the features of the land on which Wagner was thrown began to develop themselves like spectres stealing out of complete obscurity; till at length the orient lustre was caught successively by a thousand lofty pinnacles of rock;—and finally the majestic orb itself appeared, lighting up a series of verdant plains—delicious groves—glittering lakes—pellucid streams,—as well as the still turbulent ocean and the far-off mountains which had first peeped from amidst the darkness.

Fair and delightful was the scene that thus developed itself to the eyes of Wagner: but, as his glance swept the country which rose amphitheatrically from the shore, not a vestige of the presence of man could he behold. No smoke curled from amidst the groves—no church-spire peeped above the trees: nor had the wilderness of nature been disturbed by artificial culture.

He turned towards the ocean: there was not a trace of his vessel to be seen. But farther along the sand lay a dark object, which he approached with a shudder—for he instinctively divined what it was.

Nor was he mistaken: it was the swollen and livid corpse of one of the sailors of the lost ship!

Wagner's first impulse was to turn away in disgust; but a better feeling almost immediately animated him; and hastening to the nearest grove, he broke off a large bough, with which he hollowed a grave in the sand.

He deposited the corpse in the hole, threw back the sand which he had displaced, and thus completed his Christian task.

During his visit to the grove he had observed with delight that the trees were laden with fruits, and he now returned thither to refresh himself by means of the banquet thus bountifully supplied by nature.

Having terminated his repast, he walked farther inland. The verdant slopes stretched up before him, variegated with flowers, and glittering with morning dew. As he advanced, the development of all the features of that land,—lakes and woods—hills undulating like the sea in sunset, after hours of tempest—rivulets and crystal streams, each with the most luxurious fruits of the tropics, and valleys carpeted with the brightest green, varied with nature's own embroidery of flowers,—the development of this scene was inexpressibly beautiful, far surpassing the finest efforts of creative fancy.

Wagner sat himself on a sunny bank, and fell into a profound meditation.

At length, glancing rapidly around, he exclaimed aloud, as if in continuation of the chain of thoughts which had already occupied his mind. "Oh! if Nisida were here—here in this delicious clime, to be my companion! What happiness, what joy! Never should I regret the world from which this isle, for an isle it must be—is separated; never should I long to return to that communion with men from which we should be cut off! Here would the eyes of my Nisida cast forth rays of joy and gladness upon everything around; here would the sweetest transition of sentiment and feeling take place! Nisida should be the Island Queen; she should deck herself with these flowers which her fair hands might weave into wildly fantastic arabesques! Oh! all would be happiness—a happiness so serene, that never would the love of mortals be more truly blest! But, alas!" he added, as a dreadful thought broke rudely upon this delightful vision, "I should be compelled to reveal to her my secret—the appalling secret of my destiny—that when the period for transformation came round, she might place herself in safety—"

Wagner stopped abruptly, and rose hastily from his seat on the sunny bank.

The remembrance of his dreadful fate had spoilt one of the most delicious waking dreams in which he had ever indulged: and, dashing his hands against his forehead, he rushed wildly towards the chain of mountains that intersected the island.

But suddenly he stopped short, for on the ground before him lay the doublet of a man, a doublet, of the fashion then prevalent in Italy.

He lifted it up, examined it—but found nothing in the pockets: then, throwing it on the ground, he stood contemplating it for some minutes.

Could it be possible that he was in some part of Italy? that the ship had been carried back to the European continent during the tempest of the night? No—it was

impossible that so lovely a tract of land would remain uninhabited, if known to men.

The longer he reflected, the more he became convinced that he was on some island hitherto unknown to navigators, and on which some other shipwrecked individual had probably been cast. Why the doublet should have been discarded he could well understand, as it was thick and heavy and the heat of the sun was already intense, although it was not yet near the meridian.

Raising his eyes from the doublet which had occasioned these reflections, he happened to glance towards a knot of fruit trees at a little distance; and his attention was drawn to a large bough which hung down as if almost broken away from the main stem.

He approached the little grove; and several circumstances now confirmed his suspicion that he was not the only tenant of the island at that moment. The bough had been forcibly torn down—and very recently too: several of the fruits had been plucked off, the little sprigs to which they had originally hung still remaining and bearing evidence to the fact. But if additional proof were wanting of human presence there, it was afforded by the half-eaten fruits that were strewn about.

Wagner now searched for the traces of footsteps, but such marks were not likely to remain in the thick rich grass, which, if trampled down, would rise fresh and elastic again with the invigorating dew of a single night.

The grove, where Wagner observed the broken bough and the scattered fruits, was farther from the shore than the spot where he had found the doublet; and he reasoned that the man whoever he might be, had thrown away his garment, when overpowered by the intensity of the heat, and had then sought the shade and refreshment afforded by the grove.

He therefore concluded that he had gone inland—most probably towards the mountains, whose rocky pinnacles of every form now shone with every hue in the glorious sun-light.

Overjoyed at the idea of finding a human being in a spot which he had at first deemed totally uninhabited,—and filled with hope that the stranger might be able to give him some information relative to the geographical position of the isle, and even perhaps aid him in forming a raft by which they might together escape from that oasis of the Mediterranean,—Wagner proceeded towards the mountains.

By degrees the wondrous beauty of the scene became wilder—more imposing, but less bewitching: and when he reached the acclivities of the hills, the groves of fruits and copses of myrtles and citrons, of vines and almond shrubs, were succeeded by woods of mighty trees.

Farther on still, the forests ceased: and Fernand entered on a region of almost universal desolation—yet forming one of the sublimest spectacles that nature can afford.

The sounds of torrents, as yet concealed from his view, and resembling the murmur of ocean's waves, inspired feelings of awe; and it was now for the first time since he entered on the region of desolation, having left the clime of loveliness nearly a mile behind, that his attention was drawn to the nature of the soil, which was hard and bituminous in appearance.

The truth almost immediately struck him: there was a volcano amongst those mountains up which he was ascending; and it was the lava which had produced that desolation; and which, cold and hardened, formed the soil whereon he walked.

It was now past mid-day; and he seated himself once more to repose his limbs, wearied with the fatigues of the ascent, and overcome by the heat that was there intolerable.

At the distance of about two hundred yards on his right was a solitary tree—standing like a sign to mark the tomb of nature's vegetation. Upon this tree his eyes were fixed listlessly—and he was marvelling within himself how that single scion of the forest could have been spared when the burning lava, whenever the eruption might have taken place, had hurled down and reduced to cinders all its verdant brethren.

Suddenly his attention was more earnestly riveted upon the dense and wide-spreading foliage of that tree; for the boughs were shaken in an extraordinary manner—and something appeared to be moving about amongst the canopy of leaves.

In another minute a long, unmistakable, appalling object darted forth,—a monstrous snake,—suspending itself by the tail to one of the lower boughs, and disporting playfully with its hideous head towards the ground. Then, with a sudden coil, it drew itself back into the

tree, the entire foliage of which was shaken with the horrible gambollings of the reptile.

Wagner remembered the frightful spectacle which he had beheld in Ceylon; and an awful shudder crept through his frame:—for, although he knew that he bore a charmed life, yet he shrank with loathing from the idea of having to battle with such a horrible serpent.

Starting from the ground, he rushed—flew, rather than ran, higher up the acclivity, and speedily entered on a wild scene of rugged and barren rocks;—but he cared not whither the windings of the natural path which he now pursued might lead him, since he had escaped from the vicinity and from the view of the hideous boar-constrictor gambolling in the solitary tree.

Wearied with his wanderings, and sinking beneath the oppressive heat of the sun, Wagner was rejoiced to find a cavern in the side of a rock, where he might shelter and repose himself. He entered, and lay down upon the hard soil: the sounds of the torrents, which rolled still unseen amidst the chasms towards which he had approached full near, produced a lulling influence upon him;—and in a few minutes his eyes were sealed in slumber.

When he awoke, he found himself in total darkness. He started up—collected his scattered ideas—and advanced to the mouth of the cavern.

The sun had set:—but outside the cave an azure twilight prevailed, and the adjacent peaks of the mountains stood darkly out from the partially though faintly illuminated sky.

While Wagner was gazing long and intently upon the sublime grandeur of the scene, a strange phenomenon took place.

First a small cloud appeared on the summit of an adjacent hill: then gradually this cloud became more dense and assumed a human shape.

Oh! with what interest—what deep enthusiastic interest did Fernand contemplate that spectacle; for his well-stored mind at once suggested to him that he was now the witness of that wondrous optical delusion called the Mirage.

Some human being in the plain on the other side of that range of mountains was the subject of that sublime scene:—might it not be the individual of whom he was in search—the owner of the doublet?

But, ah! wherefore does Wagner start with surprise? The shadow of that human being, as it gradually assumed greater density and a more defined shape,—in a word, as it was now properly developed by the refraction of twilight—wore the form of a female!

Were there, then, many inhabitants on the opposite side of the mountains? or was there only one female—she, whose reflected image he now beheld?

He knew not; but at all events the pleasure of human companionship seemed within his reach: the presence of the doublet had convinced him that there was another man upon the island—and now the Mirage showed him the semblance of a woman!

Vast—colossal—like a dense, dark, shapely cloud, stood that reflected being in the sky: for several minutes it remained thus—and though Wagner could trace no particular outline of features, yet it seemed to him as if the female were standing in a pensive attitude.

But as the twilight gradually subsided, or rather yielded to the increasing obscurity, the image was absorbed likewise in the growing gloom; until the dusky veil of night made the entire vault above of one deep, uniform, purple hue.

Then Wagner once more returned to the cavern, with the resolution of crossing the range of hills on the ensuing morn.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE ISLAND QUEEN.

Oh! how beautiful—how enchantingly beautiful seemed Nisida, as her delicate feet bore her glancingly along the sunny banks of the crystal stream, to the soft music of its waters.

How the slight drapery which she wore set off the rich undulations of that magnificent form!—how the wreaths and the garlands of fantastically woven flowers became the romantic loveliness of her person—that glowing Hebe of the south!

Holding in her fair hand a light slim wand, and moving through the delicious vale with all the self abandonment of gait and limb which feared no intrusion on her solitude, she appeared that Mediterranean Island's Queen.

What though the evening breeze, disporting with her raiment, lifted it from her glowing bosom?—she cared not: no need for sense of shame was there! What though she laid aside her vesture to disport in the sea at morn?—no furtive glance did she cast around—no haste did she make to resume her garments; for whose eye, save that of God, beheld her?

But was she happy?

Alas! there were moments when despair seized upon her soul; and, throwing herself on the yellow sand, or on some verdant bank, she would weep—oh! she would weep such bitter, bitter tears, that those who have been forced to contemplate her character with aversion, must now be compelled to pity her.

Yes: for there were times when all the loveliness of that island seemed but a hideous place of exile, an abhorrent monotony which surrounded her—grasped her—clung to her—hemmed her in, as if it were an evil spirit having life and the power to torture her.

She thought of those whom she loved—she pondered upon all the grand schemes of her existence—and she felt herself cut off from a world to which there were so many ties to bind her, and in which she had so much to do!

Then she would give way to all the anguish of her soul—an anguish that amounted to the blackest, deepest despair, when her glances wildly swept the cloudless horizon, and beheld not a sail—no! nor a speck on the ocean to engender hope.

But when this tempest of grief and passion was past, she would be angry with herself for having yielded to it; and in order to distract her thoughts from subjects of gloom, she would bound towards the groves, light as a fawn—the dazzling whiteness of her naked and polished ankles gleaming in contrasts with the verdure of the vale.

\* \* \* \* \*

One morning—after Nisida had been many, many days in the island—she was seated on the sand, having just completed her simple toilette on emerging from the mighty bath that lay stretched in glassy stillness far as the eye could reach, when she suddenly sprang upon her feet, and threw affrighted looks around her.

Had she possessed the faculty of hearing, it would be thought that she was thus startled by the sounds of a human voice which had at that instant broken upon the solemn stillness of the isle,—a human voice emanating from a short distance behind her.

As yet she saw no one;—but in a few moments a man emerged from the nearest grove, and came slowly towards her.

He was dressed in a light jerkin, trunk-breeches, tight hose, and boots,—in all as an Italian gentleman of that day, save in respect to hat and doublet, of which he had none. Neither wore he a sword by his side, nor carried any weapons of defence; and it was evident that he approached the Island Queen with mingled curiosity and awe.

Perhaps he deemed her to be some goddess, endowed with the power and the will to punish his intrusion on her realms:—or peradventure his superstitious imagination dwelt on the tales which sailors told in those times,—how mermaids who fed on human flesh dwelt on the coasts of uninhabited islands, and assuming the most charming female forms, allured into their embrace the victims whom shipwreck cast upon their strand, and instead of lavishing on them the raptures of love, made them the prey of their ravenous maws.

Whatever were his thoughts, the man drew near with evident distrust.

But, now—why does Nisida's countenance become suddenly crimson with rage? why rushes she towards the stores which still remained piled up on the strand? and wherefore, with the rapidity of the most feverish impatience, does she hurl the weapons of defence into the sea—all save one naked sword, with which she arms herself?

Because her eagle glance—quicker than that of the man who is approaching her—has recognised him, ere he has ever been struck with a suspicious relative to who she is: and that man is Stephano Verrina!

Now, Nisida! summon all thine energies to aid thee:—for a strong—a powerful—a remorseless man, is near;—and thou art so ravishingly beautiful in thy serial drapery and thy wreaths of flowers, that an anchorite could not view thee with indifference!

Ah! Stephano starts—stops short—advances:—the suspicion has struck him! That aquiline countenance—those brilliant, large dark eyes—that matchless raven

hair—that splendid symmetrical maturity of form—and, withal, that close compression of the vermillion lips—O Nisida!—have been scanned in rapid detail by the brigand!

“Nisida!” he exclaimed: “yes—it is she!”

And he bounded towards her with outstretched arms.

But the sharp sword was presented to his chest; and the lady stood with an air of such resolute determination, that he stopped short—gazing upon her with mingled wonderment and admiration.

Heavens! he had never beheld so glorious a specimen of female loveliness as that whereon his eyes were fastened,—fastened beyond the possibility of withdrawal.

How glossy black was that hair with its diadem of white roses!—how miserably poor appeared the hues of the carnations and the pinks that formed her necklace, when in contrast with her flushing cheeks!—how dingy were the lilies at her waist when compared with her heaving breast!

The reason of the brigand reeled—his brain swam round—and for a moment it seemed to him that she was not a being of this world:—not the Nisida he had known and carried off from Italy,—but a goddess—another and yet the same in all the glory of those matchless charms which had heretofore ravished—no, maddened him!

And now the spirit of this bold and reckless man was subdued,—subdued, he knew not how nor wherefore; but still subdued by the presence of her whom he had deemed lost in the waves, but who seemed to stand before him—with flowers upon her brow and a sharp weapon in her hand—radiant, too, with loveliness of person, and terrible with the fires of hatred and indignation!

Yes! he was subdued—overawed—rendered timid as a young child in her presence; and sinking upon his knees, he exclaimed, forgetful that he was addressing Nisida the Deaf and Dumb, “Oh! fear not, I will not harm thee! But, my God! take compassion on me—spurn me not—look not with such terrible anger upon one who adores, who worships you! How is it that I tremble and quail before you—I once so reckless, so rude! But, oh! to kiss that fair hand—to be your slave—to watch over you—to protect you,—and all this but for thy smiles in return—I should be happy—supremely happy! Remember—we are alone on this island, and I am the stronger: I might compel you by force to yield to me—to become mine; but I will not harm you—no, not a hair of your head, if you will only smile upon me! And you will require one to defend and protect you—yes, even here in this island apparently so secure and safe,—for there are terrible things in this clime, dreadful beings, far more formidable than whole hordes of savage men—monsters so appalling that not all thy courage, nor all thine energy would avail thee a single moment against them. Yes, lady—believe me when I tell thee this! For many many days have I dwelt, a lonely being, on the other side of this isle—beyond that chain of mountains,—remaining on that shore to which the wild waves carried me on the night of the shipwreck. But I hurried away at last, I dared all the dangers of mighty precipices, of yawning chasms, and roaring torrents, the perils of you mountains,—rather than linger on the other side. For the anacondas, lady, is the tenant of this island, the monstrous snake, the terrible boa, whose dreadful coils, if wound around that fair form of yours, would crush it into a hideous, loathsome mass!”

Stephano had spoken so rapidly, and with such fevered excitement, that he had no time to reflect whether he were not wasting his words upon a being who could not hear them: until, exhausted and breathless with the volubility of his utterance, he remembered that he was addressing himself to Nisida the Deaf and Dumb.

But haply his appealing and his suppliant posture had softened the lady; for towards the end of his long speech a change came over her countenance, and she dropped the point of her sword towards the ground.

Stephano rose, and stood gazing on her for a few moments with eyes that seemed to devour her.

His mind had suddenly recovered much of its wonted boldness and audacity. So long as Nisida seemed terrible as well as beautiful, he was subdued—now that her eyes had ceased to dart forth lightnings, and the expression of her countenance had changed from indignation and resolute menace to pensiveness and a comparatively mournful softness, the bandit as rapidly regained the usual tone of his remorseless mind.

Yes: he stood gazing on her for a few moments, with eyes that seemed to devour her—then, in obedience to a maddening impulse, he rushed upon her, and in an instant wrenched the sword from her grasp.

But, rapid as lightning, Nisida bounded away from him, ere he could wind his arms around her; and, fleet as the startled deer, she hastened towards the groves.

Stephano, still retaining the sword in his hand, pursued her with a celerity which was sustained by his rage that she had escaped him.

But the race was as unequal as that of a lion in chase of a roe; for Nisida seemed borne along as it were upon the very air.

Leaving the groves on her left, she dashed into the vale. Along the sunny bank of the limpid stream she sped,—on, on towards a forest that bounded the valley at the farther end, and rose amphitheatrically up towards the region of the mountains!

Stephano Verrina still pursued her—though losing ground rapidly; but still he maintained the chase.

And now the verge of the forest is nearly gained; and in its mazes Nisida hopes to be enabled to conceal herself from the ruffian whom, by a glance hastily cast behind from time to time, she ascertains to be upon her track.

But, Oh! whither art thou flying thus wildly, beauteous Nisida?—into what appalling perils art thou rushing, as it were blindly?

For there, in the tallest tree on the verge of the forest to which thou art near,—there, amidst the bending boughs and the quivering foliage—one of the hideous serpents which infest the higher region of the isle, is disporting—the terrible anaconda—the monstrous boa, whose dreadful coils, if wound around that fair form of thine, would crush it into a loathsome mass!

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE TEMPTATION.—THE ANACONDA.

IN the meantime Fernand Wagner was engaged in the attempt to cross the chain of mountains which intersected the island whereon the shipwreck had thrown him.

He had clambered over rugged rocks and leapt across many yawning chasms in that region of desolation,—a region which formed so remarkable a contrast with the delicious scenery which he had left behind him.

And now he reached the basis of a conical hill, the summit of which seemed to have been split into two distinct parts; and the sinuous traces of the lava-streams, now cold and hard, and black, adown its sides, convinced him that this was the volcano, from whose rent crater had poured the bituminous fluid so fatal to the vegetation of that region.

Following a circuitous and naturally formed pathway round the base, he reached the opposite side; and now for a height of three hundred feet above the level of the sea, his eyes commanded a view of a scene as fair as that behind the range of mountains.

He was now for the first time convinced of what he had all along suspected—namely, that it was indeed an island on which the storm had cast him.

But though from the eminence where he stood, his view embraced the immense range of the ocean, no speck in the horizon—no sail upon the bosom of the expanse, imparted hope to his soul.

Hunger now oppressed him; for he had eaten nothing since the noon of the preceding day, when he had plucked a few fruits in the grove on the other side of the island. He accordingly commenced a descent towards the new region which lay stretched before him fair as even fairer than—the one which had just greeted his eyes.

But he had not proceeded many yards amidst the defiles of the rugged rocks which Nature had piled together around the base of the volcano, when he found his way suddenly barred by a vast chasm on the verge of which the winding path stopped.

The abyss was far too wide to be crossed save by the wing of the bird; and in its unfathomable depths boiled and roared a torrent, the din of whose eddies was deafening to the ear.

Wagner retraced his way to the very base of the volcano, and entered another defile; but this also terminated on the edge of the same precipice.

Again and again did he essay the various windings of that scene of rock and crag; but with no better success than at first;—and after passing a considerable time in these fruitless attempts to find a means of descent into the plains below, he began to fear that he should be compelled to retrace his way into the region of verdure which he had quitted the day before, and which lay behind the range of mountains.

But the thought of the hideous snake which he had seen in the tree, caused a cold shudder to pass over him:

—then, in the next moment, he remembered that if the region on one side of the mountains were infested with reptiles of that terrible species, it was not probable that the forest which he beheld as it were at his feet, were free from the same source of apprehension.

Still he had hoped to find human companionship on the side of the mountains which he had so far succeeded in reaching,—the companionship of the man who had cast away the doublet, and of the woman whom he had seen in the Mirage.

And was it not strange that he had not as yet overtaken, or at least obtained a trace of, the man who thus

lation?" were the words which, uttered in a mild, benignant tone, met his ears.

He turned and beheld an old man of venerable appearance, and whose beard, white as snow, stretched down to the rude leathern belt which confined the palmer's gown that he wore.

"Holy anchorite!" exclaimed Wagner,—“for such I must deem thee to be—the sound of thy voice is most welcome in this solitude, amidst the mazes of which I vainly seek to find an avenue of egress.”

“Thus is it oft with the troubles and perplexities of

“HOLDING IN HER HAND A LIGHT, SLIM WAND.” (See p. 71.)

occupied a portion of his thoughts? If that man were still amongst the mountains, they should probably meet: if he had succeeded in descending into the plains below, the same pathway that conducted him thither would also be open to Wagner.

Animated with these reflections, and in spite of the hunger which now sorely oppressed him, Wagner prosecuted with fresh courage his search for a means of descent into the lovely region that lay stretched before him: when he was suddenly startled by the sound of a human voice near him.

“My son, what dost thou amidst this scene of deso-

lution, my son,” answered the hermit,—“that world which I have quitted for ever.”

“And dost thou dwell in this desolate region?” asked Fernand.

“My cave is hard by,” returned the old man. “For forty years have I lived in the heart of these mountains, descending only into the plains at long intervals, to gather the fruits that constitute my food;—and then,” he added in a tone which, despite the sanctity of his appearance, struck cold and ominous to the very heart of Wagner,—“and then, too, at the risk of becoming the prey of the terrible anaconda!”

“Thou sayest, holy hermit,” exclaimed Fernand, en-





She saw him—she beheld him: and her speed was checked in an instant with the overpowering emotions of wonder and delight.

Then, as he hurried along the verge of the forest to encounter her—to fold her in his fond embrace—to protect her,—she once more sprang forward with outstretched arms, to fly into his, which were open to receive her.

But at that instant there was a horrible rustling amidst the foliage of the huge trees beneath which she was hastening on; a monstrous snake darted down with gushing sound, and in another moment the beauteous form of Nisida was encircled by its hideous folds.

Then fled that wondrous self-command which for long years she had exercised with such amazing success:—then vanished from her mind all the strong motives which had induced her to undertake so terrible a martyrdom as that of simulating the loss of two faculties most dear and most valuable to all human beings;—and, with a cry of ineffable anguish, she exclaimed, “*Fernand! save me—save me!*”

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### NISIDA AND WAGNER.

Oh! with what astonishment and joy would Wagner have welcomed the sound of that voice so long hushed, and now so musical even in its rending agony,—had not such an appalling incident broken the spell that years had sealed the lips of his beloved!

But he had no time for thought—there was not a moment for reflection:—Nisida lay senseless on the ground, with the monster coiled around,—its long body hanging down from the bough to which it was suspended by the tail.

Simultaneously with the cry of anguish that had come from the lips of Nisida, exclamations of horror burst alike from Wagner and Stephano.

The latter stood transfixed as it were for a few moments—his eyes glaring wildly on the dreadful spectacle before him; then, yielding to the invincible terror which had seized upon him, he hurled away the sword—knowing not what he did in the excitement of his mind—and fled!

But the gleaming of the naked weapon in the sunbeams met Wagner’s eyes, as it fell; and darting towards it, he grasped it with a firm hand—resolving also to use it with a stout heart.

Then he advanced towards the snake, which was comparatively quiescent—that portion of its long body which hung between the tree and the first coil that it had made round the beauteous form of Nisida, alone moving; and this motion was a waving kind of oscillation, like that of a bell-rope which a person holds by the end and swings gently.

But from the midst of the coils, the hideous head of the monster stood out—its eyes gleaming malignantly upon Wagner, as he approached.

Suddenly the reptile—doubtless alarmed by the flashing of the bright sword—disengaged itself like lightning from the awful embrace in which it had retained the Lady Nisida, and sprang furiously towards Fernand.

But the blow that he aimed at its head was unerring and heavy: its skull was cloven in two—and it fell on the long grass, where it writhed in horrible convulsions for some moments—although its life was gone.

Words cannot be found to describe the delirium of joy which Wagner felt, when, thus having slain the terrible anaconda, he placed his hand on Nisida’s heart and felt that it beat—though languidly.

He lifted her from the ground—he carried her in his arms to the bank of the limpid stream—and he sprinkled water upon her pale cheeks.

Slowly did she recover; and when her large black eyes at length opened, she uttered a fearful shriek, and closed them again—for with returning life, the reminiscence of the awful embrace of the serpent came back also.

But Wagner murmured words of sweet assurance and consolation—of love and joy in her ears; and she felt that it was no dream, but that she was really saved!

Then winding her arms round Fernand’s neck, she embraced him in speechless and still almost senseless trance; for the idea of such a happy deliverance was almost overpowering—amounting to an agony which a mortal creature could scarcely endure.

“Oh, Nisida,” at length exclaimed Wagner, “was it a delusion produced by the horrors of that scene?—or did thy voice really greet mine ears ere now?”

There was a minute’s profound silence—during which as they sat upon the bank of the stream, locked in a fond embrace, their eyes were fixed with fascinating gaze upon each other,—as if they could not contemplate each other too long,—he in his tenderness, and she in her passion.

“Yes, Fernand,” said Nisida, breaking that deep silence at last, and speaking in a voice so mellifluously clear—so soft, so silvery, and so penetrating in its tone, that it realized all the fond ideas which her lover had conceived of what its nature would be if it ever were restored,—“yes, Fernand, dearest Fernand,” she repeated, “you did indeed hear my voice—and to you never again shall I be mute!”

Wagner could not allow her time to say more;—he was almost wild with rapture! His Nisida was restored to him,—and no longer Nisida the Deaf and Dumb,—but Nisida who could hear the fond language which he addressed to her, and who could respond in the sweetest—most melting and delicious tones that ever came from woman’s lips.

For a long time their hearts were too full, alike for total silence or connected conversation; and, while the world from which they were cut off was entirely forgotten, they gathered so much happiness from the few words which they did exchange, and from the tender embraces in which they indulged, and from all that they read in each other’s eyes, that the emotions which they experienced might have furnished sensations for a long life!

At length—she scarcely knew how the subject began, although it might naturally have arisen of its own spontaneous suggestion,—Nisida found herself speaking of the long period of deception which she had maintained relative to her powers of speech and hearing.

“Thou lovest me well, dearest Fernand,” she said, in her musical Italian tones; “and thou wouldst not create a pang in my heart? Then never—never seek to learn wherefore, when at the still tender age of fifteen I resolved upon consummating so dreadful a sacrifice as to affect deafness and dumbness. The circumstances were indeed solemnly grave and strangely important, which demanded so awful a martyrdom. But well did I weigh all the misery and all the peril that such a self-devotion was sure to entail upon me. I knew that I must exercise the most stern—the most remorseless—the most inflexible despotism over my emotions,—that I must crush as it were the very feelings of my soul,—that I must also observe a caution so unwearied and so constantly wakeful, that it would amount to a sensitiveness the most painful,—and that I must prepare myself to hear the merry jest without daring to smile, or the exciting narrative of the world’s stirring events without suffering my countenance to vary a hue! Oh! I calculated—I weighed all this: and yet I was not appalled by the immensity of the task! I knew the powers of my own mind; and I did not deceive myself as to their extent. But ah! how fearful was it at first to hear the sounds of human voices, and yet dare not respond to them; how maddening at times was it to listen to conversation in which I longed to join, and yet be compelled to sit like a passionless statue! But mine was a will of iron strength—a resolution of indomitable power! Even when alone—when I knew that I should not be overheard—I never essayed the powers of my voice—I never murmured a single syllable to myself, so fearful was I lest the slightest use of the glorious gift of speech might render me weak in my purpose. And strange as it may seem to you, dearest Fernand, not even on this island did I yield to the temptation of suddenly breaking that long—that awful silence which I had imposed upon myself; no—not even in the midst of these solitudes did I abandon myself to the temptation of removing the seal from my lips, and raising my voice to heaven in answer to the sweet notes of the birds, or the melody of the rippling stream, or the murmurs of the sea. And, until this day, one human being only, save myself, was acquainted with that mighty secret for ten long years: and that man was the generous-hearted—the noble-minded Dr. Duras. He it was who aided me in my project of simulating the forlorn condition of the Deaf and Dumb:—he it was who bribed the turnkeys to admit me unquestioned to your cell in the prison of the ducal palace. And for years, perhaps, should I have retained my wondrous secret, even from you, dearest Fernand; for through dangers of many kinds—in circumstances of the most trying nature—have I continued firm in my purpose,—abjuring the faculty of speech even when it would have saved me from much cruel embarrassment or from actual peril. Thus, when the villain Stephano Verrina bore me

away by force from my native city, I maintained the seal upon my lips—trusting to circumstances to enable me to escape from his power without being compelled to betray a secret of such infinite value and importance to myself. But when I found that I was so narrowly watched at Leghorn that flight was impossible, I seriously debated in my own mind the necessity of raising an alarm in the house where I was kept a prisoner for two whole days: and then I reflected that I was in the power of a desperate bandit and his two devoted adherents, who were capable of any atrocity to forward their designs or prevent exposure. Lastly, when I was conveyed in the dead of the night on board the corsair-ship, the streets were deserted, and the pirates with whom Stephano was leagued thronged the port, I therefore resigned myself to my fate—trusting still to circumstances, and retaining my secret. But that incident of to-day—Oh! it was enough to crush energies ten thousand times more powerful than mine: it was of so horrifying a nature as to be sufficient to loose the bands which confine the tongue of one really dumb."

And a strong shudder convulsed the entire form of Nisida, as she thus, by her own words, recalled so forcibly to mind that terrific event which had broken a spell of ten long years' duration.

Fernand pressed her to his bosom, exclaiming, "Oh! beloved Nisida, how beautiful dost thou appear to me! how soft and charming is that dear voice of thine! Let us not think of the past—at least not now:—for I also have explanations to give thee," he added, slowly and mournfully: then, in a different and again joyous tone, he said, "Let us be happy in the conviction that we are restored to each other—let this be a holiday—nay, more," he added, sinking his voice almost to a whisper;—"let it be the day on which we join our hands together in the sight of heaven. No priest will bless our union, Nisida; but we will plight our vows; and God will accord us His blessing!"

The lady hid her blushing—glowing countenance on his breast, and murmured in a voice melodious as the music of the stream by which they sat, "Fernand, I am thine—thine for ever!"

"And I am thine, my beauteous Nisida—thine for ever, as thou art mine!" exclaimed Wagner, lifting her head and gazing on her lovely blushing face as on a vision from heaven.

"No! she is mine!" thundered the voice of the forgotten Stephano; and in a moment the bandit flung himself upon Wagner, whom he endeavoured to hurl into the crystal but deep river.

Fernand, however, caught the arm of the brigand, and dragged him along with him into the water, while a terrific scream burst from the lips of Nisida.

Then furious was the struggle that commenced in the depths of the stream: but Stephano lay beneath Wagner, who held him down on the pebbly bottom. In another moment Nisida herself plunged into the river, with the wild hope of aiding her lover to conquer his foe, or to rescue him from the grasp which the bandit maintained upon him with the tenacity than was strengthened, rather than impaired, by the agony of suffocation.

But she rose again to the surface in an instant, by the indomitable influence of that instinct for self-preservation which no human being, when immersed in the deep water, can resist, if the art of swimming have been attained.

Again she dived to succour her lover: but her aid—even if she could have afforded any—was no longer necessary; for Fernand rose from the crystal depths, and bore his Nisida to the bank, while the corpse of the drowned bandit was carried away by the current.

Wagner and Nisida were now the sole human inhabitants of that isle—the King and Queen of the loveliest cline on which the sun shone.

Towards the sea-shore they repaired, hand in hand; and, having partaken of the fruits which they gathered in their way, they set to work to form a hut with the planks, cordage, and canvas of the wreck. It will be remembered that Nisida had saved the carpenter's tools; and thus the task became a comparatively easy one.

By the time the sun went down, a tenement was formed—rude, it is true; but still perfect enough to harbour them in a cline where the nights were warm, and where the dews prevailed only in the verdant parts of the isle.

Then with what joyous feelings did Nisida deck the walls of the hut with a tapestry of flowers, and prepare the bridal-couch with materials which she had saved from the wreck!

Softly and sweetly shone the moon that night; and as its silver rays penetrated through the crevices of the little cottage so hastily and so rudely formed, they played kissingly upon the countenances of the happy pair who had wedded each other in the sight of heaven.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

ALESSANDRO FRANCATELLI.

In order that the reader should fully understand the stirring incidents which yet remain to be told, it is necessary for us to explain certain particulars connected with Alessandro Francatelli—the brother of the beautiful Flora.

It will be recollected that this young man accompanied the Florentine Envoy to Constantinople, in the honourable capacity of Secretary, some few years previously to the commencement of our tale.

Alessandro was strikingly handsome,—tall, well-formed, and of great physical strength. His manners were pleasing—his conversation agreeable to a degree. Indeed, he had profited so well by the lessons of the excellent-hearted Father Marco, that his mind was well stored with intellectual wealth. He was moreover a finished musician, and played the violin—at that period a rare accomplishment—to perfection. In addition to all these qualifications, he was a skilful versifier, and composed the most beautiful extemporaneous poetry apparently without an effort.

But his disposition was by no means light or devoted to pursuits which worldly-minded persons would consider frivolous. For he himself was worldly-minded—keen—shrewd—far-seeing—and ambitious. He deplored the ruin which had overtaken his family—and longed—ardently longed to rebuild its fortunes, adding thereto the laurels of glory and the honours of rank.

The situation which he enjoyed in the establishment of the Florentine Envoy appeared to him the stepping-stone to the attainment of these objects; but the Embassy had not been long settled in Constantinople, when Alessandro found that his master was one who, being ignorant himself, was jealous of the talents displayed by others. Great interest had alone procured the Envoy the post which he held as Negotiator Plenipotentiary with the Ottoman Porte on behalf of the Republic of Florence; and the Turkish Reis-Effendi, or Minister of Foreign Affairs, soon perceived that the Christian Ambassador was quite incompetent to enter into the intricacies of treaties and the complex machinery of diplomacy.

But suddenly the official notes which the Envoy addressed to the Effendi began to exhibit a sagacity and an evidence of far-sighted policy which contrasted strongly with the imbecility which had previously characterized those communications. It was at that period a part of the policy of the Ottoman Porte to maintain spies in the household of all the foreign ambassadors residing in Constantinople; and through this agency the Reis-Effendi discovered that the Florentine Envoy had condescended to avail himself of the brilliant talents of his Secretary, Alessandro Francatelli, to infuse spirit into his official notes.

The Reis-Effendi was himself a shrewd and sagacious man; and he recognised in the abilities evidenced by the youthful Secretary, those elements which, if properly developed, would form a great politician. The Turkish Minister accordingly resolved to leave no stone unturned in order to entice so promising an individual into the service of the Sultan.

To accomplish this object, indirect means were at first attempted; and the secret agents of the Minister sounded Alessandro upon the subject. He listened to them at first in silence—but not unwillingly. They grew bolder and their speech became more open. He encouraged them to lay bare their aims; and they hinted to him how glorious a career might be opened to him were he to enter the service of the high and mighty Sultan, Solymán the Magnificent, who then sat upon the proud throne of the Ottoman Empire.

The more attentively Alessandro listened, the less reserved became those who were instructed to undermine his fidelity towards his master, the Florentine Envoy. They represented to him how Christians, who had abjured their creed and embraced the Moslem faith, had risen to the highest offices—even to the post of Grand Vizier, or Prime Minister of the Empire.

Alessandro was completely master of his emotions: he had not studied for some years in the school of diplomacy

without learning how to render the expression of his countenance such as at any moment to belie the real state of his feelings. He did not suffer the spies and agents of the Reis-Effendi to perceive how deep an impression their words had made upon him; but he said and looked enough to convince them that the topics of their discourse would receive the most serious consideration at his hands. His mind was however already made up to accept the overtures thus made to him; but he affected to hesitate—for he saw that his services were ardently longed for, and he resolved to drive as advantageous a bargain as possible.

flashed through the two holes which were formed in the veil so as to permit the enjoyment of the faculty of sight, were gloriously brilliant, yet black as jet. Once, too, when the lady raised her delicate white hand, sparkling with jewels, to arrange the folds of that hated veil, Alessandro caught a rapid—evanescent glimpse of a neck as white as snow.

The little procession stopped at the door of a merchant's shop in the bazaar; the slaves assisted the lady to dismount, and she entered the warehouse followed by her dependants, the mule being left in charge of one of the numerous porters who thronged in the *bezestein*

AND HE BOUNDED TOWARDS HER WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS." (See p. 72.)

At length an incident occurred which hastened his decision.

He was one afternoon lounging through the principal *bezestein*, or bazaar, when he was struck by the elegant form, imposing air, and rich apparel of a lady who rode slowly along upon a mule, attended by four female slaves on foot. The outlines of her figure shaped the most admirable symmetry he had ever beheld; and though her countenance was concealed by a thick veil, in accordance with the custom of the East, yet he seemed to have been impressed with an instinctive conviction that the face beneath that invidious covering was eminently beautiful. Moreover, the eyes whose glances

Alessandro lingered near the door; and he beheld the merchant displaying various pieces of rich brocade before the eyes of the lady, who, however, scrupulously retained the dense veil over her countenance. Having made her purchases, which were taken charge of by one of the slaves, the lady came forth again; and Alessandro, forgetting that his lingering near now amounted almost to an act of rudeness, was chained to the spot—lost in admiration of her elegant gesture, her graceful yet dignified carriage, and exquisite contours of her perfect shape. Her feet and ankles, appearing beneath the full trousers, that were gathered in just at the commencement of the swell of the leg, were small and beautifully shaped; and

so light was her tread, that she scarcely seemed to touch the ground upon which she walked.

As the lady issued from the door of the merchant's shop, she cast a rapid but inquiring look towards Alessandro, though whether in anger or curiosity he was unable to determine; for the eyes only could he see—and it was impossible for him to read the meaning of the glances they sent forth, when unassisted by a view of the general expression worn by her countenance at the same time.

Accident however favoured him far more than he could have possibly anticipated. At the very moment when the lady's head was turned towards him, she tripped over the cordage of a bale of goods that had shortly before been opened beneath the painted awning over the front of the shop,—and she would have fallen had not Alessandro sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

She uttered a faint scream—for her veil had shifted aside from its proper position; and her countenance was thus revealed to a man—and that man evidently a Christian.

Instantly recovering her self-possession, she readjusted her veil—gave a gentle but graceful inclination of the head towards Alessandro—mounted her mule by the assistance of the slaves—and rode away at a somewhat hasty pace.

Alessandro stood gazing after her until she turned the angle of the nearest street; and it struck him that her glance was for an instant cast rapidly back towards him, ere she disappeared from his view.

And no wonder that he stood thus rooted to the spot, following her with his eyes;—for the countenance which accident had revealed to him was already impressed upon his heart. It was one of those lovely Georgian faces, oval in shape, and with a complexion formed of milk and roses, which have at all times been prized in the East as the very perfection of female beauty,—a face, which, without intellectual expression, possesses an ineffable witchery and all the charms calculated to fascinate the beholder. The eyes were black as jet—the hair of a dark auburn, and luxuriantly rich in its massive beauty: the lips were of bright vermilion—and between them were two rows of pearl, small and even. The forehead was high and broad, and white as marble, with the delicate blue veins visible through the transparent complexion.

Alessandro was ravished as he reflected on the wondrous beauty thus for a moment revealed to him; but his raptures speedily changed to positive grief when he thought how improbable it was that this fair creature would ever cross his path again.

He entered the warehouse, made a small purchase, and inquired casually of the Turkish merchant if he knew who the lady was. The reply was in the negative; but the merchant informed Alessandro that he had no doubt the lady was of some rank, from the profound respect with which her slaves treated her, and from the readiness with which she paid the prices demanded of her for the goods she had purchased, Turkish ladies generally being notorious for their disposition to drive a hard bargain with traders.

Alessandro returned to the suburb of Pera, in which the mansion of the Florentine Embassy was situate,—his mind full of the beautiful creature whose countenance he had seen for a moment, and whose soft form he had also for a moment—a single moment, held in his arms. He could not apply himself to the duties of his office, but feigned indisposition and retired to the privacy of his own apartment. And never did that chamber seem so lonely—so cold—so cheerless. He could not sit down—and he grew only the more restless by pacing backwards and forwards. His entire disposition appeared to have become suddenly changed: he felt that the world now contained something the possession of which was positively necessary to his happiness. One sole idea absorbed all his thoughts: the most lovely countenance which in his estimation he had ever seen, was so indelibly reflected in the mirror of his mind, that his imagination could contemplate naught besides.

He knew not that whenever he went abroad he was watched by one of the spies of the Reis-Effendi; and he was therefore surprised when, on the following day, that secret agent of the Minister whispered in his ear, "Christian, thou lovest!—and it depends on thyself whether thou wilt be loved in return!"

Alessandro was stupefied at these words. His secret was known—or at least suspected. He questioned the individual who had thus addressed him; and he found that the incident of the preceding day was indeed more

than suspected—it was known. He besought to know who the lady was; but the spy would not, or could not satisfy him. He however promised that he would endeavour to ascertain a point in which Alessandro appeared to be so deeply interested.

The intriguing spirit of Turkish dependants is notorious: the reader will not therefore be surprised when we state that in a few days the spy made his appearance in Alessandro's presence with a countenance denoting joyous tidings. The young Italian was impatient to learn the result of the agent's inquiries.

"I know not who the lady is," was the reply; "but this much I have to impart to you, signor,—that she did not behold you the other day with indifference—that she is grateful for the attention which you displayed in offering your aid to save her from perhaps a serious accident—and that she will grant you a few moments' interview this evening, provided you assent to certain conditions to be imposed upon you, respecting the preliminary arrangements for your meeting."

"Name them! name them!" exclaimed Alessandro, with wild joy, and almost doubting whether he were not in the midst of a delicious dream.

"That you consent to be blindfolded while being conducted into her presence,—that you maintain the most profound silence while with those who will guide you to her abode,—and that you return from the interview under the same circumstances of precaution."

"I should be unworthy the interest which she deigns to manifest in my behalf, were I to refuse compliance with those terms," answered Alessandro.

"An hour after sunset," said the spy, "you will meet me at the gate of the Mosque of Selimya:—and with these words he hurried away, leaving the young Florentine in a state of excited hope, amounting almost to a delirium of joy.

Alessandro was well aware that adventures, such as the one in which he found himself suddenly involved, were by no means uncommon in the East, and that ladies of the most unimpeachable virtue as well as of the highest rank, frequently accorded interviews of this private nature to those men who were fortunate enough to merit their attention,—such visits being the first step towards matrimonial connexions. But then he remembered that he was a Christian, and the fair object of his devotion was most probably of the Moslem faith. What, then, would be the result? Was some wealthy lady of high rank about to abandon her creed for his sake? or would the sacrifice of his faith be required as the only condition on which his complete happiness might be achieved?

He knew not—he cared but little; it was sufficient for him that he was to meet the charming being whose image had never once quitted his mind, from the first moment that he had seen her in the bezesteen!

Even before the appointed hour, was Alessandro pacing the square in front of the splendid temple which the Sultan Selim, the conqueror of Egypt, had erected, and which bore his imperial name. At length the agent, for whom he waited, made his appearance. This man, though actually a Turkish dependant in the service of the Florentine Envoy, was, as before stated, neither more nor less than one of the numerous spies placed by the Reis-Effendi about the person of that ambassador. Alessandro was aware of this, in consequence of the offers and representations that had been made to him through the means of this agent; and though the youth suspected that the man knew more concerning the beautiful idol of his heart than he had chosen to admit, yet he had seen enough to convince him of the intuity of questioning him on that head.

It was therefore in silence that Alessandro followed his guide through several by-streets, down to the margin of the waters of the Golden Horn. There a boat, in which two rowers and a female slave were seated, was waiting.

"Here must you be blindfolded," said the spy. For a few moments Alessandro hesitated—in regret that he had gone so far with this adventure. He had heard fearful tales of dark deeds committed on the waters of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn; and he himself, when roving during his leisure hours along the verdant banks of those waters, had seen the livid corpse float by—with the tale-telling bow-string fastened round the neck.

The spy seemed to divine his thoughts. "You hesitate, signor," he said; "then let us retrace our way. But remember," he added in a low tone, "that were treachery intended, it would be as easy to

perform the deed where you now stand, as on the bosom of that star-lit gulf."

Alessandro hesitated no longer, but suffered himself to be completely hooded in a cap which the spy drew over his countenance. He was then conducted into the boat and guided to a seat next to the female slave. The spy leapt upon the strand—the boatmen plied their oars—and the skiff shot away from the bank, no one uttering a word.

#### CHAPTER XLV.

##### THE LADY OF CONSTANTINOPLE.

FOR upwards of half-an-hour did the boat skim the surface of the Golden Horn, the dip of the oars in the water and the rippling around the sharp prow alone breaking the solemn silence of the night.

At length the skiff stopped; and the female slave took Alessandro's hand, whispering in a low tone, "I will serve as thy guide, Christian; but speak not till thou hast permission."

She then led him from the boat, up a flight of steps, and through a garden—for he occasionally came in contact with the outstretching branches of shrubs, and there was moreover a delicious odour of flowers, as he proceeded in the total darkness of his blindfolding.

At the expiration of ten minutes, the guide stopped; and Alessandro heard a key turn in a lock.

"Enter there," said the slave, pushing him gently forward, and speaking in a low tone. "Take off the cap—attire yourself in the raiment you will find ready provided—and then pass fearlessly through the door at the farther end of the room. You will meet me again in the hall which you will thus reach."

And, without waiting for a reply, the slave closed and locked the door through which Alessandro had just passed.

Hastily did he remove the cap, which had indeed almost suffocated him; and he now found himself in a small apartment, elegantly furnished in the most luxurious oriental fashion, and brilliantly lighted. A table, spread with confectionery, cakes, fruits, sherbet, and even wines,—though the fermented juice of the grape be expressly forbidden by the laws of the Prophet Mohammed,—occupied the centre of the room. Around the walls were the continuous sofas, or ottomans, so conducive to the enjoyment of a voluptuous indolence; the floor was spread with a carpet so thick that the feet sank into the silky texture, as into newly fallen snow; and whichever way he turned, Alessandro beheld his form reflected in vast mirrors set in magnificent frames. There were no windows on any side of this apartment; but there was a cupola, fitted with stained glass, on the roof; and Alessandro judged that he was in one of those voluptuous Kiosks usually found in the gardens of wealthy Turks.

Precisely as the slave had informed him, he found an elegant suit of Moslem garments set out on the sofa for his use; and he hastened to exchange his Italian costume for the oriental raiment. As he thus attired himself, it was necessary to contemplate himself in the mirror facing him, so as properly to adjust clothes to which he was totally unaccustomed; and it struck him that the garb of the infidel became him better than that of the Christian.

He did not, however, waste time in the details of his strange toilette; but as soon as it was completed, opened the door at the farther end of the room, in pursuance of the instructions he had received.

Alessandro now found himself in a large marble hall, from which several flights of stairs led to the apartments above. The place was refulgent with the light of numerous chandeliers, the glare of which was enhanced by the vast mirrors attached to the walls and the crystal pillars that supported the roof.

Not a human being met Alessandro's eyes; and he began to fear either that he had mistaken the directions he had received, or that some treachery was intended, when a door opened, and the female slave, wrapped in her veil, made her appearance.

Placing her forefinger upon that part of the veil which covered her lips, to enjoin silence, she led the way up the nearest staircase, Alessandro following her with a heart beating audibly. They reached a door at which a negro slave was stationed.

"The Hakim," said Alessandro's guide, laconically

\* The Physician.

addressing herself to the negro, who bowed in silence and threw open the door.

The female slave conducted the pretended physician into a small but elegantly furnished ante-room, in which there were several other dependants of her own sex.

A door at the further end was opened—Alessandro passed through into another, larger, and still more magnificently appointed room,—the door closed behind him, and he found himself alone with the idol of his adoration.

Half-seated—half-lying upon cushions of scarlet brocade, the glossy bright hue of which was mellowed by the muslin spread over it, appeared the beauteous creature whose image was so faithfully delineated in his memory. She was attired in the graceful and becoming *dualma*—a purple vest which set close to her form with a species of elasticity shaped itself so as to develop every contour. But, in accordance with the custom of the clime and age the *dualma* was open at the bosom, sloping from each lovely white shoulder to the waist, where the two folds joining, formed an angle at which the purple vest was fastened by a diamond worth a monarch's ransom. The sleeves were wide, but short—scarcely reaching to the elbow, and leaving all the lower part of the snowy arms completely bare. Her ample trousers were of purple silk, covered with the finest muslin, and drawn in tight a little above the ankles, which were naked. On her feet she wore crimson slippers cut very low, and each ornamented with a diamond. Round her person, below the waist, she wore a magnificent shawl, rolled up as it were negligently so as to form a girdle or zone, and fastened in front with two large tassels of pearls. Diamond bracelets adorned her fair arms; and her head-dress consisted of a turban, or shawl of light but rich material, fastened with golden bodkins, the head of each being a pearl of the best water. Beneath this turban her rich auburn hair, glowing like gold in the light of the perfumed lamps, and amidst the blaze of diamonds which adorned her, was parted in massive bands, sweeping gracefully over her temples and gathered behind the ears, then falling in all the luxuriance of its rich clustering folds over the cushion whereon she reclined.

Her finger-nails were slightly tinged with hennah—the rosy hue the more effectually setting off the lily whiteness of her delicate hand and full, round arm. But no need had she to die the lashes of her eyes with the famous *kohl* so much used by oriental ladies: for those lashes were by nature formed of the deepest jet—a somewhat unusual, but beauteous contrast with the colour of her hair.

The cheeks of the lovely creature were slightly flushed—or it might have been a reflection of the scarlet brocade of the cushion on which, as we have said, she was half-seated, half-lying, when Alessandro appeared in her presence.

For a few moments the young Italian was so dazzled by her beauty—so bewildered by the appearance of that lady whose richness of attire seemed to denote the rank of Sultana, that he remained rooted to the spot, uncertain whether to advance—to retire—or to fall upon his knees before her.

But in an encouraging tone, and in a voice musical as a silver bell, the lady said, "Approach, Christian!"—and she pointed to a low ottoman within a few paces of the sofa which she herself occupied.

Alessandro now recovered his presence of mind; and no longer embarrassed and awkward, but with graceful ease and yet profound respect, he took the seat indicated.

"Beauteous lady," he said, "how can I ever demonstrate the gratitude—the illimitable boundless gratitude which fills my heart, for the joy—the truly elysian delight afforded me by this meeting?"

"You speak our language well, Christian," observed the lady, smiling faintly at the compliment conveyed by the words of Alessandro, but evading a direct reply.

"I have for some years past been in the service of the Florentine Envoy, lady," was the answer; "and the position which I occupy at the Palace of the Embassy has led me to study the beauteous language of this clime, and to master its difficulties. But never—never did that language sound so soft and musical upon my ears as now when flowing from those sweet lips of thine."

"The Moslem maiden dares not listen to the flattery of the Infidel," said the beauteous stranger, in a serious but not severe tone. "Listen to me, Christian, with attention—for our meeting must not be prolonged many minutes. To say that I beheld thee with indifference



when we first encountered each other in the bazaar, were to utter a falsehood, which I scorn: to admit that I can love thee—and love thee well," she added, her voice slightly trembling, "is an avowal which I do not blush to make. But never can the Moslem maiden bestow her hand on the Infidel. If thou lovest me—if thou wouldst prove thyself worthy of that affection which my heart is inclined to bestow upon thee, thou wilt renounce the creed of thy forefathers, and embrace the Mussulman faith. Nor is this all that I require of thee, or that thou must achieve to win me. Become a True Believer—acknowledge that Allah is God and Mohammed is his Prophet—and a bright and glorious destiny will await thee. For, though thou wilt depart hence without learning my name—nor who I may be—nor the place to which you have been brought to meet me, though we shall behold each other no more until thou hast rendered thyself worthy of my hand, yet shall I ever be mindful of thee, my loved one! An unseen—an unknown influence will attend thee: thy slightest wishes will be anticipated and fulfilled in a manner for which thou wilt vainly seek to account,—and, as thou provest thy talents or thy valour, so will promotion open its doors to thee with such rapidity that thou wilt strain every nerve to rise to the highest offices in the State,—for then only mayest thou hope to receive my hand, and behold the elucidation of the mystery which up to that date will envelope thy destinies."

While the lady was thus speaking, a fearful struggle took place in the breast of Alessandro,—for the renunciation of his creed—a creed in which he must ever in his heart continue to believe, though ostensibly he might abjure it—such renunciation was an appalling step to contemplate. Then to his mind also came the images of those whom he loved, and who were far away in Italy—his aunt who had been so kind to him, his sister whom he knew to be so proud of him, and Father Marco, who manifested such deep interest in his behalf. But on his ears continued to flow the honied words and the musical tones of the charming temptress; and, as she gradually developed to his imagination the glorious destinies upon which he might enter, offering herself as the eventual prize to be gained by a career certain to be pushed on successfully through the medium of a powerful though mysterious influence,—Florence, relatives, and friends became as secondary considerations in his mind—and by the time the lady brought her long address to a conclusion—that address which had grown more impassioned and tender as she proceeded—Alessandro threw himself at her feet, exclaiming, "Lovely hour! that thou art—beauteous as the maidens that dwell in the Paradise of thy Prophet—I am thine, I am thine!"

The lady extended her right hand, which he took and pressed in rapture to his lips.

But, the next moment, she rose lightly to her feet, and assuming a demeanour befitting a royal Sultana, said in a sweet though impressive tone, "We must now part—thou to enter on thy career of fame—I to set in motion every spring within my reach to advance thee to the pinnacle of glory and power. Henceforth thy name is Ibrahim! Go, then, my Ibrahim, and throw thyself at the feet of the Reis-Effendi; and that great Minister will forthwith present thee to Piri-Pacha, the Grand Vizier. Toil diligently—labour ardously—and the rest concerns me. Go, then, my Ibrahim, I say,—and enter on the path which will lead thee to the summit of fame and power!"

She extended her arms towards him—he snatched her to his breast, and covered her cheeks with kisses. In that paradise of charms he could have revelled for ever; but the tender caresses lasted not beyond a few moments: for the lady tore herself away from his embrace, and hurried into an adjacent apartment.

Alessandro—or rather the renegade Ibrahim—passed into the ante-room where his guide, the female slave, awaited his return. She conducted him back to the hall, and advanced towards the door of the voluptuous Kiosk where he had changed his raiment.

"Goest thou forth a Christian saint, or a True Believer?" she asked, turning suddenly round.

"As a Mussulman," answered the renegade, while his heart sank within him, and remorse already commenced its torture.

"Then thou hast no further need of the Christian garb," said the slave. "Await me here."

She entered the Kiosk, and returned in a few moments with the cap, which, in obedience to her directions, he once more drew on his head and over his countenance. The slave then led him into the garden, which they

threaded in profound silence. At length they reached the steps leading down to the water; and the slave accompanied him into the boat, which immediately shot away from the bank.

Alessandro had now ample time for calm reflection. The excitement of the hurried incidents of the evening was nearly over; and though his breast was still occupied with the image of his beautiful Unknown, and with the brilliant prospects which she had opened to his view, he nevertheless shrank from the foul deed of apostasy which he had vowed to perpetrate. But we have already said that he was essentially worldly-minded, and, as he felt convinced that the petty jealousy of the Florentine Envoy would prevent him from rising higher in the diplomatic hierarchy than the post of Secretary, he by degrees managed to console himself for his renegadism on the score that it was the necessary—the indispensable stepping-stone to the gratification of his ambition.

Thus by the time the boat touched the landing-place where he had at first entered it, he had succeeded to some extent in subduing the pangs of remorse.

The female slave now bade him remove the cap from his face, and resume his turban. A few moments sufficed to make this change; and he was about to step on shore, when the woman caught him by the sleeve of his caftan, and, thrusting a small case of sandal-wood into his hand, said, "She who you saw ere now, commanded me to give thee this."

The slave pushed him gently towards the bank: he obeyed the impulse and landed—she remaining in the boat, which instantly darted away again, most probably to convey her back to the abode of her charming mistress.

On the top of the bank the renegade was accosted by the spy whom he had left there when he embarked in the skiff.

"Allah and the Prophet be praised!" exclaimed the man, surveying Alessandro attentively by the light of the lovely moon: "thou art now numbered amongst the Faithful!"

The apostate bit his lips to keep down the sigh of remorse which rose to them; and his guide, without uttering another word, led the way to the palace of the Reis-Effendi. There Alessandro—or Ibrahim, as we must henceforth call him—was lodged in a splendid apartment, and had two slaves appointed to wait upon him.

He, however, hastily dismissed them, and, when alone, opened the case that had been put into his hands by the female slave.

It contained a varied assortment of jewellery and precious stones, constituting a treasure of immense value.

But, oh! how utterly worthless—how miserably insignificant, were the diamonds in that case and even the bright eyes of her whose image was in his heart,—how dim, too, was all the prospective glory of those brilliant destinies opened to his view,—when compared with that jewel beyond all price, from the sphere of whose supernal lustre he had wantonly strayed,—the jewel—the inestimable jewel of the Christian faith!

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE APOSTATE IBRAHIM.

CONSTANTINOPLE, like haughty Rome, is built on seven hills—the houses being so disposed that they do not intercept the view commanded by each on the amphitheatrical acclivities. But the streets are narrow, crooked, and uneven; and the grand effects of the numerous stately mosques and noble edifices are subdued, or in many cases altogether lost, either by the insignificant width of the thoroughfares in which they stand, or by the contiguity of mean and miserable wooden tenements.

The mosque of Saint Sophia, once a Christian church, with its magnificent portico, supported by marble columns, its nine vast folding doors, adorned with bas-reliefs, and its stupendous dome, a hundred and twenty feet in diameter;—the mosque of the Sultan Solymán, forming an exact square with four noble towers at the angles, and with its huge cupola in the midst;—the mosque of the Sultan Ahmed, with its numerous domes, its tall minarets, and its tall colonnades supported by marble pillars; and the mosque of the Sultana Valida, or Queen Mother of Mohammed the Fourth, excelling all other Mussulman churches in the delicacy of its architecture and the beauty of its columns of marble and jasper, supplied by the ruins of Troy,—these are the most remarkable temples in the Ottoman Empire.

The Grand Bezestein, or Exchange, is likewise a magnificent structure,—consisting of a spacious hall of circular form, built of free-stone, and surrounded by shops displaying the richest commodities of oriental commerce.

In the Ladies' Bazaar there is a marble column of extraordinary height, and on the sides of which, from the foot to the crown are represented in admirable bas-reliefs, the most remarkable events which characterized the reign of the Emperor Arcadius, ere the capital of the Roman dominions of the East fell into the hands of the descendants of Osman.

number of buildings, constituting a complete town of itself. But within this enclosure dwell upwards of ten thousand persons—the entire court of the Sultan. There reside the great officers of state, the body guards, the numerous corps of bostandjis, or gardeners, and baltais, or fire-wood purveyors,—the corps of white and black eunuchs, the pages, the mutes, the dwarfs,—the ladies of the harem, and all their numerous attendants.

There are nine gates to the palace of the Sultan. The principal one opens on the square of Saint Sophia, and is very magnificent in its architecture. It is this gate which is called the Sublime Porte—a name figuratively

“‘FERNAND! SAVE ME—SAVE ME!’” (See p. 75.)

But of all the striking edifices at Constantinople, that of the Sultan's palace, or seraglio, is the most spacious and the most magnificent.

Christian writers and readers are too apt to confound the seraglio with the harem, and to suppose that the former means the apartments belonging to the Sultan's ladies; whereas the word *seraglio*, or rather *serail*, represents the entire palace, of which the *harem*, or females' dwelling, is but a comparatively small portion.

The seraglio is a vast enclosure, occupying nearly the entire site of the ancient city of Byzantium, and embracing a circumference of five miles. It contains nine enormous courts of quadrangular form, and an immense

given to the Court of the Sultan, in all histories, records, and diplomatic transactions.

It was within the enclosure of the seraglio that Alessandro Francatelli—whom we shall henceforth call by his apostate name of Ibrahim—was lodged in the dwelling of the Reis-Effendi, or Minister of Foreign Affairs. But in the course of a few days the renegade was introduced into the presence of Piri-Pacha, the Grand Vizier—that high functionary who exercised a power almost as extensive and as despotic as that wielded by the Sultan himself.

Ibrahim, the apostate, was received by his highness Piri-Pacha at a private audience: and the young man

exerted all his powers, and called to his aid all the accomplishments which he possessed to render himself agreeable to that great Minister. He discoursed in an intelligent manner upon the policy of Italy and Austria, and gave the Grand Vizier considerable information relative to the customs, resources, and condition of those countries. Then, where the Vizier touched upon lighter matters, Ibrahim showed how well he was already acquainted with the works of the most eminent Turkish poets and historians; and the art of music being mentioned, he gave the Minister a specimen of his proficiency on the violin. Piri-Pacha was charmed with the young renegade, whom he immediately took into his service as one of his private secretaries.

Not many weeks elapsed before the fame of Ibrahim's accomplishments and rare talents reached the ears of the Sultan, Solymán the Magnificent; and the young renegade was honoured with an audience of the ruler of the East. On this occasion he exerted himself to please even more triumphantly than when he was introduced to the Grand Vizier; and the Sultan commanded that henceforth Ibrahim should remain attached to his person, in the capacity of Keeper to the Archives.

We should observe that the despatches which the Florentine Envoy wrote to the government of the Republic contained but a brief and vague allusion to the apostasy of Alessandro Francatelli; merely mentioning that the youth had become a Mussulman, and entered the service of the Grand Vizier, but not stating either the name which he had adopted, nor the brilliant prospects which had so suddenly opened before him. The Florentine ambassador treated the matter thus lightly, because he was afraid of incurring the blame of his government for not having kept a more stringent watch over his subordinate, were he to attach any importance to the fact of Alessandro's apostasy. But he hoped that by merely glancing at the event as one scarcely worth special notice, the Council of Florence would be led to treat it with equal levity. Nor was the ambassador deceived in his calculations; and thus the accounts which reached Florence relative to Alessandro's renegadism—and which were not indeed communicated to the Council until some months after the occurrence of the apostasy itself—were vague and indefinite to a degree.

And had Ibrahim no remorse? did he never think of his lovely sister Flora, and of his affectionate aunt who, in his boyhood, had made such great and generous sacrifices to rear him honourably? Oh! yes;—but a more powerful idea dominated the remembrance of kindred and the attachment to home;—and that idea was ambition! Moreover, the hope of speedily achieving that greatness which was to render him eligible and worthy to possess the charming being whose powerful influence seemed to surround him with a constant halo of protection, and to smooth down all the asperities which are usually found in the career of those who rise suddenly and rise highly—this ardent longing hope not only encouraged him to put forth all his energies to make himself master of a glorious position, but also subdued to no small extent the feelings of compunction which would otherwise have been too bitter, too agonizing, to endure.

His mind was, moreover, constantly occupied. When not in attendance upon the Sultan, he devoted all his time to render himself intimately acquainted with the laws, polity, diplomatic history, resources, condition, and finances of the Ottoman Empire: he also studied the Turkish literature, and practised composition, both in prose and verse, in the language of that country which was now his own.

But think not, reader, that he was in his heart a Mussulman, or that he had extinguished the light of Christianity within his soul. No—oh! no: the more he read on the subject of the Mohammedan system of theology, the more he became convinced not only of its utter falsity, but also of its incompatibility with the progress of civilization. Nevertheless he dared not pray to the True God whom he had renounced with his lips; but there was a secret adoration, an interior worship of the Saviour, which he could not, and sought not to subdue.

Solymán the Magnificent was an enlightened prince, and a generous patron of the arts and sciences. He did not persecute the Christians, because he knew in his own heart that they were farther advanced in all humanizing ideas and institutions than the Ottomans. He was therefore delighted whenever a talented Christian embraced the Moslem faith, and entered his service; and his keen

perception speedily led him to discern and appreciate all the merits and requirements of his favourite Ibrahim.

Such was the state of things at Constantinople, when all those rapidly successive incidents, which we have already related, took place in Florence.

At this time immense preparations were being made by the Sultan for an expedition against the island of Rhodes, then in the possession of the Knights of St. John, commanded by their Grand Master, Villiers of Isle-Adam. This chieftain, aware of the danger which menaced him, despatched envoys to the courts of Rome, Genoa, Venice, and Florence, imploring those powers to send him assistance against the expected invasion of the Turks. Each of these states hastened to comply with this request; and numerous bodies of auxiliaries sailed from various ports of Italy to fight beneath the glorious banner of Villiers of Isle-Adam, one of the staunchest veteran champions of Christendom.

Thus, at the very time when Nisida and Wagner were united in the bonds of love on the island of which they were the possessors—while, too, Isaacar the Jew languished in the prisons of the Inquisition of Florence, at which city the chivalrous-hearted Manuel d'Orsini tarried to hasten on the trial and to give his testimony in favour of the Israelites—and moreover while Flora and the Countess Giulia dwelt in the strictest retirement with the young maiden's aunt—at this period, we say, a fleet of three hundred sail quitted Constantinople, under the command of the Kapitan-Pacha, or Lord High Admiral, and proceeded towards the island of Rhodes.

At the same time, Solymán the Magnificent crossed into Asia Minor, and placing himself at the head of an army of a hundred thousand men, commenced his march towards the coast facing the island, and where he intended to embark on his warlike expedition. His favourite Ibrahim accompanied him, as did also the Grand Vizier, Piri-Pacha, and the principal dignitaries of the empire.

It was in the spring of 1521,\* that the Ottoman fleet received the army on board at the Cape in the Gulf of Maeri, which is only separated by a very narrow strait from the island of Rhodes; and in the evening of the same day on which the troops had thus embarked, the mighty armament appeared off the capital city of the Knights of St. John.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE SIEGE OF RHODES.

On the following morning, salvos of artillery throughout the fleet announced to the inhabitants and garrison of Rhodes that the Sultan was about to effect a landing with his troops.

The debarkment was not resisted; for it was protected by the cannonade which the ships directed against the walls of the city, and the Christians had no vessels capable of demonstrating any hostility against the mighty fleet commanded by the Kapitan-Pacha.

Villiers of Isle-Adam, the generalissimo of the Christian forces, had reduced to ashes all the circumjacent villages, and received their inhabitants into the city itself. But the Ottomans cared not for the waste and desolation thus created around the walls of the city; but while the artillery, alike on land and by sea, maintained an incessant fire on the town, they threw up works of defence, and established depots of provisions and ammunition.

The Sultan went in person, accompanied by Ibrahim, and attended by a numerous escort, to reconnoitre the fortifications, and inspect the position of his troops.

On the other side, Villiers of Isle-Adam distributed his forces in such a manner that the warriors of each nation defended particular gates. Thus the corps of Spaniards, French, Germans, English, Portuguese, Italians, Anvergne, and Provincials, respectively defended eight of the gates of Rhodes; while the Lord General himself, with his body-guard, took his post at the ninth. For the knights of Rhodes comprised natives of nearly all Christian countries; and the mode in which Villiers thus allotted a gate to the defence of the warriors of each nation, gave an impulse to that emulative spirit which ever induces the soldiers of one clime to vie with those of another.

The Ottoman troops were disposed in the following

\* To suit the plot of our tale we have been compelled to perpetrate a slight anachronism; it being really in July, 1522, when Solymán the Magnificent undertook the memorable siege of Rhodes.

manner:—Ayaz-Pacha, Beglerbeg (or governor) of Roumilia, found himself placed in front of the walls and gate defended by the French and Germans; Ahmed Pacha was opposed to the Spaniards and Auvergnese; Mustapha-Pacha had to contend with the English; Kasim, Beglerbeg of Anatolia, was to direct the attack against the bastion and gate occupied by the natives of Provence; the Grand Vizier, Piri-Pacha, was opposed to the Portuguese; and the Sultan himself undertook the assault against the defences occupied by the Italians.

For several days there was much skirmishing; but no advantage was gained by the Ottomans. Mines and counter-mines were employed on both sides; and those executed by the Christians effected terrible havoc amongst the Turks. At length, in pursuance of the advice of the renegade Ibrahim, the Sultan ordered a general assault to be made upon the city: and heralds went through the entire encampment, proclaiming the imperial command.

Tidings of this resolution were conveyed into the city by means of the Christians' spies; and while the Ottomans were preparing for the attack, Villiers of Isle-Adam was actively employed in adopting all possible means for the defence.

At day-break the general assault commenced; and the Aga (or colonel) of the Janizaries succeeded in planting his banner on the gate entrusted to the care of the Spaniards and Auvergnese. But this success was merely temporary in that quarter; for the Ottomans were beaten back with such immense slaughter, that fifteen thousand of their choicest troops were cut to pieces in the breach and ditch.

But still the assault was prosecuted in every quarter and every point; and the Christian warriors acquitted themselves nobly in the defence of the city. The women of Rhodes manifested a courage and zeal which history has loved to record as most honourable to them and to their sex. Some of them carried about bread and wine to recruit the fainting and refresh the wearied; others were ready with bandages and lint to stanch the blood which flowed from the wounded; some conveyed earth in wheel-barrow, to stop up the breaches made in the walls; and others bore along immense stones to hurl down upon the assailants.

Oh! it was a glorious, but a sad and mournful scene—that death-struggle of the valiant Christians against the barbarism of the East! And many, many touching proofs of woman's courage and daring characterized that memorable siege. Especially does this fact merit our attention:—The wife of a Christian captain, seeing her husband slain, and the enemy gaining ground rapidly, embraced her two children tenderly, made the sign of the cross upon their brows, and then, having stabbed them to the heart, threw them into the midst of a burning building near, exclaiming, "The Infidels will not now be able, my poor darlings, to wreak their vengeance upon you, alive or dead!" In another moment she seized her dead husband's sword, and plunging into the thickest of the fight, met a death worthy of a heroine.

The rain now began to fall in torrents, washing away the floods of gore which since day-break had dyed the bastions and the walls; and the assault continued as audaciously as the defence was maintained with desperation.

Solyman commanded in person the division which was opposed to the gate and the fort entrusted by the Lord General of the Christians to the care of the Italian auxiliaries. But, though it was now past noon, and the Sultan had prosecuted his attack on that point with unabated vigour since the dawn, no impression had yet been made. The Italians fought with a heroism which bade defiance to the numerical superiority of their assailants: for they were led on by a young chieftain, who, beneath an effeminate exterior, possessed the soul of a lion. Clad in a complete suit of polished armour, and with crimson plumes waving from his steel helmet, to which no vizor was attached, that youthful leader threw himself into the thickest of the medley, sought the very points where danger appeared most terrible—and, alike by his example and his words, encouraged those whom he commanded to dispute every inch of ground with the Moslem assailants.

The Sultan was enraged when he beheld the success with which the Italian chieftain rallied his men again after every rebuff; and, calling to Ibrahim to keep near him, Solyman the Magnificent advanced towards the breach which his cannon had already effected in the walls defended so gallantly by the Italian auxiliaries. And now, in a few minutes, behold the Sultan himself,

nerved with wonderful energy, rushing on—scimitar in hand—and calling on the young Italian warrior to measure weapons with him. The Christian chieftain understood not the words which the Sultan uttered, but full well did he comprehend the anxiety of that great monarch to do battle with him; and the curved scimitar and the straight cross-handled sword clashed together in a moment. The young warrior knew that his opponent was the Sultan, whose imperial rank was denoted by the turban which he wore; and the hope of inflicting chastisement on the author of all the bloodshed which had taken place on the walls of Rhodes inspired the youth with a courage perfectly irresistible.

Not many minutes had this combat lasted before Solyman was thrown down in the breach, and the cross-handled sword of his conqueror was about to drink his heart's blood, when the renegade Ibrahim dashed forward from amidst the confused masses of those who were fighting around, and by a desperate effort hurled the young Italian warrior backwards.

"I owe thee my life, Ibrahim," said the Sultan, springing upon his feet. "But hurt not him who has combated so gallantly; we must respect the brave!"

The Italian chieftain had been completely stunned by his fall; he was, therefore easily made prisoner and carried off to Ibrahim's tent.

Almost at the same moment a messenger from Ahmed Pacha presented to the Sultan a letter, in which it was stated that the Grand Master, Villiers of Isle-Adam, anxious to put a stop to the fearful slaughter that was progressing, had offered to capitulate on honourable terms.

This proposition was immediately agreed to by the Sultan; and a suspension of hostilities was proclaimed around the walls. The Ottomans retired to their camp, having lost upwards of thirty thousand men during that deadly strife of a few hours; and the Christians had now leisure to ascertain the extent of their own disasters, which were proportionately appalling.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE PRISONER.

In the meantime Ibrahim had ordered his prisoner, the young Italian chieftain, to be conveyed to his tent: and when the renegade's slaves had disencumbered the Christian of his armour, he began to revive.

As Ibrahim bent over him, administering restoratives, a suspicion, which had already struck him the moment he first beheld his face, grew stronger and stronger; and the apostate at length became convinced that he had seen that countenance on some former occasion.

Ordering his slaves to withdraw, Ibrahim remained alone with his prisoner, who was now able to sit up on the sofa and gaze around him.

"I understand it all!" he exclaimed, the blood rushing back to his pale cheek; "I am in the power of the barbarians!"

"Nay, call us not harsh names, brave chieftain," said Ibrahim, "seeing that we do not treat you unworthily."

"I was wrong," cried the prisoner; then, fixing his fine blue eyes upon the renegade, he added, "Were you not habited as a Moslem, I should conceive, by the purity with which you speak my native language, that you were a Christian, and an Italian."

"I can speak many languages with equal fluency," said Ibrahim, evasively, as a pang shot through his heart. "But tell me thy name, Christian—for thou art a brave man, although so young."

"In my own country," answered the youth, proudly, "I am called the Count of Riverola."

We have before stated that Ibrahim was the complete master of his emotions; but it required all his powers of self-possession to subdue them now, when the name of that family into which he was well aware his sister had entered fell upon his ears. His suspicion was well founded: he had indeed seen Francisco before this day—he had seen him when he was a mere boy in Florence, for Alessandro was three or four years older than the young Count. But he had never, in his native land, exchanged a word with Francisco: he had merely occasionally seen him in public; and it was quite evident that even if Francisco had ever noticed him at that time, he did not recollect him now. Neither did Ibrahim wish the young Count to ascertain who he was; for the only thing which the renegade ever feared was the encounter of any one who had known him as a Christian, and who might

justly reproach him for that apostacy which had led him to profess Mohammedanism.

"Lord Count of Riverola," said Ibrahim, after a short pause, "you shall be treated in a manner becoming your rank and your bravery. Such indeed was the command of my imperial master, the most glorious Sultan; but even had no such order been issued, my admiration of your gallant deportment in this day's strife would lead us to the same result."

"My best thanks are due for these assurances," returned Francisco. "But tell me how fares the war without?"

"The Grand Master has proffered a capitulation, which has been accepted," answered Ibrahim.

"A capitulation!" ejaculated Francisco. "Oh! it were better to die in defence of the cross than live to behold the crescent triumphant on the walls of Rhodes!"

"The motive of the Grand Master was a humane one," observed Ibrahim: "he has agreed to capitulate to put an end to the terrific slaughter that was going on."

"Doubtless the Lord General acts in accordance with the dictates of a matured wisdom!" exclaimed the Count of Riverola.

"Your lordship was the leader of the Italian auxiliaries," said Ibrahim, interrogatively.

"Such was the honourable office entrusted to me," was the reply. "When messengers from Villiers of Isle-Adam arrived in Florence beseeching succour against this invasion, which has, alas! proved too successful, I panted for occupation to distract my mind from ever pondering on the heavy misfortunes which had overtaken me."

"Misfortunes!" exclaimed Ibrahim.

"Yes—misfortunes of such a nature that the mere thought of them is madness!" cried Francisco, in an excited tone. "First, a beauteous and amiable girl—one who, though of humble origin, was endowed with virtues and qualifications that might have fitted her to adorn a palace, and whom I fondly, devotedly loved—was snatched from me. She disappeared, I know not how! All trace of her was suddenly lost, as if the earth had swallowed her up and closed over her again! This blow was in itself terrible. But it came not alone. A few days elapsed, and my sister—my dearly beloved sister—also disappeared, and in the same mysterious manner. Not a trace of her remained—and what makes this second affliction the more crushing—the more overwhelming, is that she is deaf and dumb! Oh! heaven grant me the power to resist—to bear up against these crowning miseries! Yain were all my inquiries—useless was all the search I instituted to discover whither had gone the being whom I would have made my wife, and the sister who was ever so devoted to me! At length, driven to desperation, when weeks had passed and they returned not—goaded on to madness by bitter, bitter memories—I resolved to devote myself to the service of the cross. With my gold I raised and equipped a gallant band; and a favouring breeze wafted us from Leghorn to this island. The Grand Master received me with open arms; and, forming an estimation of my capacities far above my deserts, placed me in command of all the Italian auxiliaries. You know the rest: I fought with all my energy, and your Sultan was within the grasp of death, when you rushed forward and saved him. The result is that I am your prisoner."

"So young—and yet so early acquainted with such deep affliction!" exclaimed Ibrahim. "But can you form no idea, Christian, of the cause of that double disappearance? Had your sister no attendants who could throw the least light upon the subject?" he asked, with the hope of eliciting some tidings relative to his own sister, the beauteous Flora.

"I dare not reflect thereon!" cried Francisco, the tears starting into his eyes. "For, alas! Florence has long been infested by a desperate band of lawless wretches—and, my God! I apprehend the worst—the very worst!"

Thus speaking, he rose and paced the spacious tent with agitated steps: for this conversation had awakened in his mind all the bitter thoughts and dreadful alarms which he had essayed to subdue amidst the excitement and peril of war.

A slave now entered to inform Ibrahim that the Sultan commanded his immediate presence in the imperial pavilion.

"Christian," said Ibrahim, as he rose to obey this mandate, "wilt thou pledge me thy word as a noble and a knight not to attempt an escape from this tent?"

"I pledge my word," answered Francisco, "seeing that thou thyself art so generous towards me."

Ibrahim then went forth; but he paused for a few moments outside the tent to command his slaves to serve up choice refreshments to the prisoner. He then hastened to the pavilion of the Sultan, whom he found seated upon a throne surrounded by the Beglerbegs, the Councillors of State, the Viziers, the Lieutenant-Generals of his army, and all the high dignitaries who had accompanied him on his expedition.

Ibrahim advanced and prostrated himself at the foot of the throne; and at the same moment two of the high functionaries present threw a caftan of honour over his shoulders—a ceremony which signified that the Sultan had conferred upon him the title of Beglerbeg, or "Prince of Princes."

"Rise, Ibrahim Pacha!" exclaimed Solymán; "and take thy place in our councils—for Allah and his Prophet have this day made thee their instrument to save the life of thy sovereign."

The newly-created Pacha touched the imperial slipper with his lips, and then rising from his prostrate position received the congratulations of the high functionaries assembled.

Thus was it that in a few months, protected by that secret influence which was hurrying him so rapidly along in his ambitious career, the Italian apostate attained to a high rank in the Ottoman empire: but he was yet to reach the highest, next to that of the sovereign, ere he could hope to receive the fair hand of his mysterious patroness as the crowning joy of his prosperity. For her image—her charming image ever dwelt in his mind; and an ardent fancy often depicted her as she appeared, in all the splendour of her beauty, reclining on the sofa at the dwelling to which he had been conducted with so much precaution, as detailed in a preceding chapter.

On the following day peace was formally concluded between the Ottomans and the Knights of Rhodes, the latter consenting to surrender the island to the formidable invaders. An exchange of prisoners was the result; and Francisco, Count of Riverola, again found himself free within twenty-four hours after his capture.

"Your lordship is now about to sail for your own clime," said Ibrahim, when the moment of separation came; "is there aught within my power that I can do to testify my friendship for one so brave and chivalrous as thou art?"

"Nothing, great Pacha!" exclaimed Francisco, who felt his sympathy irresistibly attached towards Ibrahim—he knew not why. "But, on the other hand, receive my heartfelt thanks for the kindness which I have experienced during the few hours I have been your guest."

"The history of your afflictions has so much moved me," said Ibrahim Pacha, after a brief pause, "that the interest I experience in your behalf will not cease when you shall be no longer here. If, then, you would bear in mind the request I am about to make, gallant Christian—"

"Name it!" cried Francisco: "'tis already granted!"

"Write to me from Florence," added Ibrahim; "and acquaint me with the success of thy researches after thy lost sister and the maiden whom thou lovest. The ships of Leghorn trade to Constantinople, whither I shall speedily return; and it will not be a difficult matter to forward a letter to me occasionally."

"I should be unworthy the kind interest you take in my behalf, great Pacha, were I to neglect this request," answered Francisco. "Oh! may the good angels grant that I may yet recover my beloved sister Nisida, and that sweetest of maidens—Flora Francatelli!"

Francisco was too much overpowered by his own emotions to observe the sudden start which Ibrahim gave, and the pallor which instantaneously overspread his cheeks, as the name of his sister thus burst upon his ears—that sister who, beyond all doubt, had disappeared most strangely.

But, with an almost superhuman effort, he subdued any farther expression of the agony of his feelings; and, taking Francisco's hand, said, in a low, deep tone, "Count of Riverola, I rely upon your solemn promise to write to me—and write soon—and often! I shall experience a lively pleasure in receiving and responding to your letters."

"Fear not that I shall forget my promise to your highness," answered Francisco.

He then took leave of Ibrahim-Pacha, and returned into the city of Rhodes, whence he embarked on the same day for Italy, accompanied by the few Florentine

auxiliaries who had survived the dreadful slaughter on the ramparts.

The bustle and excitement attending the preparations for departure from Rhodes, somewhat absorbed the grief which Ibrahim felt on account of the mysterious disappearance of his sister Flora. Solymán left a sufficient force, under an able commander, to garrison the island, which was speedily evacuated by Villiers of Isle-Adam and his knights; and by the middle of May, the Sultan, attended by Ibrahim and other dignitaries of the empire, once more entered the gates of Constantinople.

Not many days had elapsed when at a Divan, or State Council, at which Solymán the Magnificent himself presided, Ibrahim-Pacha was desired to give his opinion upon a particular question then under discussion. The renegade expressed his sentiments in a manner at variance with the policy recommended by the Grand Vizier; and this high functionary replied in terms of bitterness and even grossness, at the same time reproaching Ibrahim with ingratitude. The apostate delivered a rejoinder which completely electrified the Divan. He repudiated the charge of ingratitude on the ground of being influenced only by his duty towards the Sultan; and he then entered upon a complete review of the policy of the Grand Vizier, Piri-Pacha. He proved that the commerce of the country had greatly fallen off—that the revenues had diminished—that arrears were due to the army and navy—that several minor powers had not paid their usual tribute for some years past,—and, in a word, drew such a frightful picture of the effects of maladministration and misrule, that the Grand Vizier was overwhelmed with confusion, and the Sultan and other listeners were struck with the lamentable truth of all which had fallen from the lips of Ibrahim-Pacha. Nor less were they astonished at the wonderful intimacy which he displayed with even the minutest details of the machinery of the government: in a word, his triumph was complete.

Solymán the Magnificent broke up the Divan in haste, ordering the members of the council to return each immediately to his own abode.

In the evening a functionary of the imperial household was sent to the palace of the Grand Vizier to demand the seals of office; and thus fell Piri-Pacha.

It was midnight when the Sultan sent to order Ibrahim-Pacha to wait upon him without delay. The conference that ensued was long and interesting; and it was already near day-break when messengers were despatched to the various members of the Divan to summon them to the seraglio. Then, in the presence of all the rank and talent of the capital, the Sultan demanded of Ibrahim whether he felt sufficient confidence in himself to undertake the weight and responsibility of office.

All eyes were fixed earnestly upon that mere youth of scarcely twenty-three, who was thus solemnly adjured.

In a firm voice he replied that, with the favour of the Sultan, and the blessing of the Most High, he did not despair of being enabled to restore the Ottoman Empire to all its late prosperity and glory.

The astronomer of the Court declared that the hour was favourable to invest the new Grand Vizier with the insignia of office; and at the moment when the call to prayer, "*God is Great!*" sounded from every minaret in Constantinople, Ibrahim-Pacha received the imperial seals from the hand of the Sultan.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE NEW GRAND VIZIER.

THE call to prayer, "*God is Great,*" sounded from every minaret in Constantinople, when Solymán the Magnificent raised the renegade, Ibrahim, to a rank second only to his own imperial station.

The newly-appointed Prime Minister received the congratulations of the assembled dignitaries of the empire; and, when this ceremony was accomplished, he repaired to the palace of the Vizership, which Piri-Pacha had vacated during the night.

A numerous escort of slaves and a guard of honour, composed of an entire company of Janizaries, attended Ibrahim to his new abode, the streets through which he passed being lined with spectators anxious to obtain a glimpse of the new Minister.

But calm—almost passionless—was the expression of Ibrahim's countenance: though he had attained to his present station speedily, yet he had not reached it unexpectedly; and, even in the moment of this, his proud

triumph, there was gall mingled with the cup of honey which he quaffed.

For, oh! the light of Christianity was not extinguished within his breast; and though it no longer gleamed there to inspire and cheer, it nevertheless had strength sufficient to burn with reproachful flame.

The multitudes cheered and prostrated themselves as he passed: but his salutation was cold and indifferent; and he felt at that moment that he would rather have been wandering through the Vale of Arno, hand-in-hand with his sister, than be welcomed in the streets of Constantinople as the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire!

O crime! thou mayst deck thy brow with flowers and adorn thy garments with the richest gems,—thou mayst elicit the shouts of admiring myriads, and proceed, attended by guards ready to hew down those who would treat thee with disrespect,—thou mayst quit the palace of a mighty sovereign to repair to a palace of thine own,—and in thine hands thou mayst hold the destinies of millions of human beings; but thou canst not subdue the still small voice that whispers reproachfully in thine ear, nor pluck from thy bosom the undying worm.

Though Ibrahim-Pacha felt acutely, yet his countenance, as we before said, expressed nothing:—he was still sufficient master of his emotions to retain them pent up in his own breast; and if he could not appear completely happy, he would not allow the world to perceive that his soul harboured secret care.

He entered the palace now destined to become his abode, and found himself the lord and master of an establishment such as no Christian monarch in all Europe possessed. But as he passed through marble halls and perfumed corridors lined with prostrate slaves,—as he contemplated the splendour and magnificence, the wealth and the luxury, by which he was now surrounded,—and as he even dwelt upon the hope—nay, the more than hope, the conviction, that he should full soon be blest with the hand of a being whose ravishing beauty was ever present to his mental vision,—that still small voice which he could not hush, appeared to ask him of what avail it was for a man if he gain the whole world but lose his own soul?

But Ibrahim-Pacha was not the man to give way to the influence of even reflections so harrowing as these; and he immediately applied himself to the business of the State to divert his mind from unpleasurable meditations. Holding a levee that same day, he received and confirmed in their offices all the subordinate Ministers: he then despatched letters to the various governors of provinces to announce to them his elevation to the Grand Vizership; and he conferred the Pachalick of Egypt upon the fallen Minister, Piri-Pacha. In the afternoon he granted audiences to the Ambassadors of the Christian powers; but the Florentine Envoy, it should be observed, had quitted Constantinople some weeks previously—indeed at the time when the Sultan undertook his expedition against Rhodes; for the representative of the Republic had utterly failed in the mission which had been entrusted to him by his government.

In the evening, when it was quite dark, Ibrahim retired to his apartment; and hastily disguising himself in a mean attire, he issued forth by a private gate at the back part of the palace. Intent upon putting into execution a scheme which he had hastily planned that very afternoon, he repaired to the quarter inhabited by the Christians. There he entered a house of a humble appearance where dwelt a young Greek, with whom he had been on friendly terms at that period when his present greatness was totally unforeseen—indeed while he was simply private secretary of the Florentine Envoy. He knew that Demetrius was poor, intelligent, and trustworthy; and it was precisely an agent of this nature that Ibrahim required for the project which he had in view.

Demetrius—such was the young Greek's name—was seated in a small and meanly furnished apartment, in a desponding manner, and scarcely appearing to notice the efforts which his sister, a beautiful maiden of nineteen, was exerting to console him, when the door opened and a man dressed as a water-carrier entered the room.

The young Greek started up angrily, for he thought that the visitor was one of the numerous petty creditors to whom he was indebted, and whose demands he was unable to liquidate; but the second glance which he cast by the light of the lamp that burnt feebly on the table, towards the countenance of the meanly dressed individual, convinced him of his mistake.

"His Highness, the Grand Vizier!" ejaculated Deme-



trine, falling on his knees; "Calanthe!" he added, speaking rapidly to his sister, "bow down to the representative of the Sultan!"

But Ibrahim hastened to put an end to this ceremony, and assured the brother and sister that he came thither as a friend.

"A friend!" repeated Demetrius, as if doubting whether his ears heard aright; "is it possible that heaven has indeed sent me a friend in one who has the power to raise me and this poor suffering maiden from the depths of our bitter, bitter poverty?"

"Dost thou suppose that my rapid elevation has rendered me unmindful of former friendships?" demanded Ibrahim; although had he not his own purposes to serve, he would never have thought of seeking the abode, nor inquiring after the welfare of the humble acquaintance of his obscure days.

The young Greek knew not, however, the thorough selfishness of the renegade's character; and he poured forth his gratitude for the Vizier's kindness and condescension with the most sincere and heartfelt fervour; while the beautiful Calanthe's large dark eyes swam in tears of hope and joy, as she surveyed with mingled wonder and admiration the countenance of that high functionary, whose rapid rise to power had electrified the Ottoman capital, and whom she now saw for the first time.

"Demetrius," said Ibrahim, "I know your worth—I have ever appreciated your talents—and I feel deeply for the orphan condition of your sister and yourself. It is in my power to afford you an employment whereby you may render me good service, and which shall be liberally rewarded. You are already acquainted with much of my former history; and you have often heard me speak, in terms of love and affection, of my sister Flora. During my recent sojourn in the island of Rhodes, a Florentine nobleman, the Count of Riverola, became my prisoner. From him I learnt that he was attached to my sister, and his language led me to believe that he was loved in return. But, alas! some few months ago Flora suddenly disappeared; and the Count of Riverola instituted a vain search to discover her. Too pure-minded was she to fly of her own accord from her native city; too chaste and too deeply imbued with virtuous principles was she to admit the suspicion that she had fled with a vile seducer. No: force or treachery—if not murder," added Ibrahim, in a tone indicative of profound emotion, "must have caused her sudden disappearance. The Count of Riverola has doubtless ere now arrived in Italy; and his researches will most assuredly be renewed. He promised to communicate to me their result; but, as he knew not to whom that pledge was given—as he recognised not in me the brother of the Flora whom he loves—I am fearful lest he forget or neglect the promise. It is therefore my intention to send a secret agent to Florence,—an agent who will convey rich gifts to my aunt, but without revealing the name of him who sends them,—an agent, in a word, who may minister to the wants and interests of my family, and report to me whether my beloved sister be yet found, and, if so, the causes of her disappearance. It seems to me that you, Demetrius, are well fitted for this mission. Your knowledge of the Italian language—your discretion—your sound judgment, all render you competent to enact the part of a good genius watching over the interests of those who must not be allowed to learn whence flow the bounties which suddenly pour upon them."

"Gracious lord," said the young Greek, his countenance radiant with joy, "I will never lose any opportunity of manifesting my devotion to the cause in which your Highness condescends to employ me."

"You will proceed alone to Italy," continued Ibrahim: "and on your arrival in Florence, you will adopt a modest and reserved mode of life, so that no unpleasant queries may arise as to your object in visiting the Republic."

Demetrius turned a rapidly inquiring glance upon Calanthe, who hastened to observe that she did not fear being left unprotected in the city of Constantinople.

Ibrahim placed a heavy purse and a case containing many costly jewels in the hands of Demetrius, saying, "These are in earnest of my favour and friendship;"—then, producing a second case, tied round with a silken cord, he added, "And this for my aunt, the Signora Francatelli."

Demetrius promised to attend to all the instructions which he had received; and Ibrahim-Pacha took his leave of the brother and the charming sister, the latter of whom conveyed to him the full extent of her gratitude

for his kindness and condescension to them in a few words uttered in a subdued tone, but with all the eloquence of her fine dark eyes.

"Did I not love my unknown protectress," murmured Ibrahim to himself, as he sped rapidly back to his palace, "if I feel that Calanthe's eyes would make an impression upon my heart!"

Scarcely had he resumed his magnificent garb, on his return home, than a slave announced to him that his Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, required his immediate attendance at the seraglio, whither he was to repair in the most private manner possible.

A sudden misgiving shot through Ibrahim's imagination. Could Solymán have repented of the step which he had taken in thus suddenly elevating him to the pinnacle of power? Was his Viziership to last but a few short hours? had the secret influence, which had hitherto protected him, ceased?

Considering the time and the country in which he lived, these fears were justifiable; and it was with a rapidly beating heart that the new Minister hastened, attended only by a single slave, to the dwelling of his imperial master.

But when he was ushered into the presence of the Sultan,—his own slave remaining in the ante-room,—his apprehensions were dissipated by the smiling countenance with which the monarch greeted him.

Having signalled his attendants to retire, Solymán the Magnificent addressed the Grand Vizier in the following manner:—

"Thy great talents, thy zeal in our service, and the salvation which I owed to thee in the breach of Rhodes, have been instrumental, O Ibrahim! in raising thee to thy present high state. But the bounties of the Sultan are without end, as the mercy of Allah is illimitable! Thou has doubtless heard that amongst my numerous sisters, there is one of such unrivalled beauty,—such peerless loveliness, that the world hath not seen her equal. Happy may that man deem himself on whom the fair Aïsha shall be bestowed;—and you are the happy man, Ibrahim—and Aïsha is thine!"

The Grand Vizier threw himself at the feet of his imperial master, and murmured expressions of gratitude;—but his heart sank within him—for he knew that in marrying the Sultan's sister, he should not be allowed the enjoyment of the Mussulman privilege of polygamy; and thus his hopes of possessing the beautiful unknown, to whom he owed so much, appeared to hover on the verge of annihilation. But might not that unknown lady and the beautiful Aïsha be one and the same person? The unknown was evidently the mistress of an influence almost illimitable; and was it not natural to conceive that she, then, must be the sister of the Sultan? Again,—the Sultan had many sisters; and the one who had exerted herself for Ibrahim might not be the Princess Aïsha who was now promised to him!

All these conjectures and conflicting speculations passed through the mind of Ibrahim in far less time than we have taken to detail their nature; and he was cruelly the prey to mingled hope and alarm when the Sultan exclaimed, "Rise, my Vizier Azem,\* and follow me."

The apostate obeyed with a beating heart; and Solymán the Magnificent conducted him along several passages and corridors to a splendidly furnished room, which Ibrahim instantly recognised as the very one in which he had been admitted, many months previously, to an interview with the beautiful unknown. Yes—that was the apartment in which he had listened to the eloquence of her soft, persuasive voice;—it was there that, intoxicated with passion, he had abjured the faith of a Christian and embraced the creed of the false Prophet Mohammed.

And, reclining on the very sofa where he had first seen her—but attended by a troop of female slaves,—was the fair unknown—his secret protectress—more lovely, more bewitching than she appeared when last they met!

An arch smile played upon her lips, as she rose from the magnificent cushions,—a smile which seemed to say, "I have kept my word—I have raised thee to the highest dignity save one in the Ottoman Empire—and I will now crown thine happiness by giving thee my hand!"

And, oh! so beautiful—so ravishingly lovely did she appear, as that smile revealed teeth whiter than the orient pearls which she wore, and as a slight flush on her damask cheek and the bright flashing of her eyes betrayed the joy and triumph which filled her heart,—so elegant and graceful was her faultless form, which the gorgeous Ottoman garb so admirably became, that Ibrahim forgot all

\* "My Prime Minister."

his recent compunctions—lost sight of home and friends—remembered not the awful apostacy of which he had been guilty,—but fell upon his knees in adoration of that charming creature, while the Sultan, with a smile which showed that he was no stranger to the mysteries of the past, exclaimed in a benignant tone, "Vizier Asem! receive the hand of my well-beloved sister, Aischa!"

## CHAPTER L.

## THE COUNT OF ARESTINO.—THE PLOT THICKENS.

RETURN we now to the fair city of flowers,—to thee, delightful Florence—vine-crowned queen of Tuscany.

The summer has come; and the gardens are brilliant with dyes and hues of infinite variety; the hills and the valleys are clothed in their brightest emerald garments,—and the Arno winds its peaceful way between banks blushing with the choicest fruits of the earth.

But, though gay that July scene—though glorious in its splendour that unclouded summer sun—though gorgeous the balconies filled with flowers, and brilliant the parterres of Tuscan roses,—yet gloomy was the countenance and dark were the thoughts of the Count of Arestino, as he paced with agitated steps one of the splendid apartments of his palace.

That old man was naturally endowed with a good—a generous—a kind—and a forgiving disposition; but the infidelity of his wife—the being on whom he had so doated, and who was once his joy and his pride—that infidelity had warped his best feelings—soured his temper—and aroused in his soul the dark spirit of Italian vengeance.

"She lives! she lives!" he murmured to himself, pausing for a moment to press his feverish hand to his heated brow: "she lives!—and doubtless under the protection of her paramour! But I shall know more presently. Antonio is faithful—he will not deceive me!"

And the Count resumed his agitated walk up and down the room.

A few minutes elapsed, when the door opened slowly, and Antonio—whom the reader may remember to have been a valet in the service of the Riverola family—made his appearance.

The Count hastened towards him, exclaiming, "What news, Antonio? speak—hast thou learnt any more of—of her?"

"My lord," answered the valet, closing the door behind him, "I have ascertained everything. The individual who spoke darkly and mysteriously to me last evening has within this hour made me acquainted with many strange things."

"But the Countess?—I mean the guilty, fallen creature who once bore my name?" ejaculated the old nobleman, his voice trembling with impatience.

"There is no doubt, my lord, that her ladyship lives—and that she is still in Florence," answered Antonio.

"The shameless woman!" cried the Count of Arestino, his usually pale face becoming perfectly death-like through the violence of his inward emotions. "But how know you all this?" demanded his lordship, suddenly turning towards the dependant: "who is your informant? and can he be relied on? Remember, I took thee into my service at thine own solicitation—I have no guarantee for thy fidelity—and I am influential to punish as well as rich to reward!"

"Your lordship has bound me to you by ties of gratitude," responded Antonio: "for when discarded suddenly by the young Count of Riverola, I found an asylum and employment in your lordship's palace. It is your lordship's bounty which has enabled me to give bread to my aged mother; and I should be a villain were I to deceive you."

"I believe you, Antonio," said the Count: "and now tell me how you are assured that the Countess escaped from the conflagration and ruin of the institution to which my just vengeance had consigned her,—how, too, you have learnt that she is still in Florence."

"I have ascertained, my lord, beyond all possibility of doubt," answered the valet, "that the assailants of the convent were a terrible horde of banditti, at that time headed by Stephano Verrina, who has since disappeared no one knows whither,—that the Marquis of Orsini was one of the leaders in the awful deed of sacrilege,—and that her ladyship the Countess and a young maiden, named Flora Fracatelli, were rescued by the robbers from their cell in the establishment. These ladies and the Marquis quitted the stronghold of the banditti together, blindfolded, and guided forth by that same

Stephano Verrina whom I mentioned just now, Lomellino (the present captain of the horde), and another bandit."

"And who is your informant? how learnt you all this?" demanded the Count, trembling with the excitement of painful reminiscences re-awakened, and with the hope of speedy vengeance on the guilty pair—his wife and the Marquis.

"My lord," said Antonio, "pardon me if I remain silent on that head: but I dare not compromise the individual who—"

"Antonio!" exclaimed the Count, wrathfully, "you are deceiving me! Tell me who was your informant—I command you—hesitate not—"

"My lord!—my lord!" ejaculated the valet; "is it not enough that I prove my assertions—that I—"

"No!" cried the nobleman; "I have seen so much duplicity where all appeared to be innocence—so much deceit where all wore the aspect of integrity, that I can trust man no more. How know I for certain that all this may not be some idle tale which you yourself have forged, to induce me to put confidence in you—to entrust you with gold to bribe your pretended informant, but which will really remain in your own pocket? Speak, Antonio—tell me, or I shall listen to you no more, and your servitude in this mansion then ceases."

"I will speak frankly, my lord," replied the valet: "but in the course which you may adopt—"

"Fear not for yourself nor for your informant, Antonio," interrupted the Count, impatiently. "Be ye both leagued with the banditti yourselves—or be ye allied to the fiends of hell," he added with bitter emphasis, "I care not so long as I can render ye the instruments of my vengeance!"

"Good, my lord!" exclaimed Antonio, delighted with this assurance: "and now I can speak fearlessly and frankly. My informant is that other bandit who accompanied Stephano Verrina and Lomellino when the Countess, Flora, and the Marquis were conducted blindfold from the robbers' stronghold. But while they were yet all inmates of that stronghold, this same bandit, whose name is Venturo, overheard the Marquis inform Stephano Verrina that he intended to remain in Florence to obtain the liberation of a Jew who was imprisoned in the dungeons of the Inquisition; and this Jew, Venturo also learnt by subsequent inquiry from Verrina, is a certain Isaacar ben Solomon."

"Isaacar ben Solomon!" ejaculated the Count, the whole incident of the diamonds returning with all its painful details to his mind. "Oh! no wonder," he added bitterly, "that the Marquis has so much kindness for him! But, proceed—proceed, Antonio."

"I was about to inform your lordship," continued the valet, "that Venturo, of whom I have spoken, happened the next day to overhear the Marquis inform the Countess that he should be compelled to stay for that purpose in Florence; whereupon Flora Fracatelli offered her ladyship a home at her aunt's residence, whither she herself should return on her liberation from the stronghold. Then it was that the maiden mentioned to the Countess the name of her family; and when Venturo represented all these facts to me just now, I at once knew who this same Flora Fracatelli is and where she dwells."

"You know where she dwells!" cried the Count joyfully. "Then Giulia—the false, the faithless, the perjured Giulia is in my power! Unless, indeed," he added more slowly,—"unless she may have removed to another place of abode—"

"That, my lord, shall be speedily ascertained," said Antonio. "I will instruct my mother to call, on some pretext, at the cottage inhabited by Dame Fracatelli; and she will soon learn whether there be another female resident there besides the aunt and the niece Flora."

"Do so, Antonio," exclaimed the Count. "Let no unnecessary delay take place. Here is gold—much gold, for thee to divide between thyself and the bandit informant. See that thou art faithful to my interests, and that sum shall prove but a small earnest of what thy reward will be."

The valet secured about his person the well-filled purse that was handed to him, and then retired.

The Count of Arestino remained alone to brood over his plans of vengeance. It was horrible—horrible to behold that aged and venerable man, trembling as he was on the verge of eternity, now meditating schemes of dark and dire revenge. But his wrongs were great,—wrongs which, though common enough in that voluptuous Italian clime, and especially in that age and city of

licentiousness and debauchery, were not the less sure to be followed by a fearful retribution where retribution was within the reach of him who was outraged.

"Ha! ha!" he chuckled fearfully to himself, as he now paced the room with a lighter step—as if joy filled his heart: "all those who have injured me are within the reach of my vengeance! The Jew in the Inquisition—the Marquis open to a charge of diabolical sacrilege—and Ginlia assuredly in Florence! I dealt too leniently with that Jew—I sent to pay for the redemption of jewels which were my own property! All my life have I been a just—a humane—a merciful man: I will be so no more. The world's doings are adverse to generosity and fair dealing. In my old age I have learnt this! Oh! the perfidy of woman towards a doating a confiding—a fond heart, works strange alterations in the deceived one! I, who but a year,—nay, six months ago, would not harm the meanest reptile that crawls, now thirst for vengeance—vengeance," repeated the old man, in a shrieking, hysterical tone, "upon those who have wronged me! I will exterminate them at one fell swoop—exterminate them all!"

And his voice rang screechingly and wildly through the lofty room of that splendid mansion.

## CHAPTER LI.

### A MEETING.

ON the bank of the Arno, in a somewhat retired situation, stood a neat cottage in the midst of a little garden, surrounded by no formal pile of bricks to constitute a wall, but protected only by its own sweet hedge of fragrant shrubs and blooming plants.

Over the portico of the humble but comfortable tenement twined the honeysuckle and the clematis; and the sides of the building were almost completely veiled by the vines amidst the verdant foliage of which appeared large bunches of purple grapes.

At an open casement on the ground-floor, an elderly female, very plainly but very neatly attired, and wearing a placid smile and a good-natured expression upon a countenance which had once been handsome, sat watching the glorious spectacle of the setting sun.

The orb of day went down in a flood of purple and gold, behind the western hills; and now the dame began suddenly to cast uneasy glances towards the path that led along the bank of the river.

But the maiden for whose return the good aunt felt anxious, was not far distant:—indeed, Flora Francatelli, wearing a thick veil over her head, was already proceeding homeward after a short ramble by the margin of the stream, when the reverie in which she was plunged was interrupted by the sounds of hasty footsteps behind.

Ever fearful of treachery since the terrible incident of her imprisonment in the Carmelite convent, she redoubled her speed, blaming herself for having been beguiled by the beauty of the evening to prolong her walk farther than she had intended on setting out,—when the increasing haste of the footsteps behind her excited the keenest alarms within her bosom—for she now felt convinced that she was pursued.

The cottage was already in sight, and a hundred paces only separated her from its door, when a well-known voice—a voice which caused every fibre in her heart to thrill with surprise and joy—exclaimed, "Flora! beloved one; fly not! Oh! I could not be deceived in the symmetry of thy form—the gracefulness of thy gait: I knew it was thou!"

And in another moment the maiden was clasped in the arms of Francisco, Count of Riverola.

Impossible were it to describe the ecstatic bliss of this meeting,—a meeting so unexpected on either side; for a minute before, and Flora had deemed the young nobleman to be far away, fighting in the cause of the Cross: while Francisco was proceeding to make inquiries at the cottage concerning his beloved, but with a heart that scarcely dared nourish a hope of her re-appearance.

"Oh! my well-beloved Flora!" exclaimed Francisco; "and are we indeed thus blest? or is it a delusive dream? But tell me, sweet maiden, tell me whether thou hadst ceased to think of one from whose memory thine image has never been absent since the date of thy sudden and mysterious disappearance?"

Flora could not reply in words—her heart was too full for the utterance of her feelings: but, as she raised the veil from her charming countenance, the tears of joy which stood upon her long lashes, and the heavenly

smiles which played upon her lips, and the deep blushes which overspread her cheeks, spoke far more eloquently of unaltered affection than all the vows and pledges which might have flowed from the tongue.

"Thou lovest me—lovest me still!" exclaimed the enraptured Count, again clasping her in his arms, and now imprinting innumerable kisses on her lips, her cheeks, and her fair brow.

Hasty explanations speedily ensued: and Francisco now learnt for the first time the cause of Flora's disappearance—her incarceration in the convent—and the particulars of her release.

"But who could have been the author of that outrage?" exclaimed the Count, his cheeks flushing with indignation and his hand instinctively grasping his sword: "whom could you, sweet maiden, have offended? what fiend thus vented his infernal malignity on thee?"

"Hold, my lord!" cried Flora, in a beseeching tone: "perhaps you—"

And she checked herself abruptly.

"Call me not 'my lord,' dearest maiden," said the Count: "To thee I am Francisco, as thou to me art Flora—my own beloved Flora! But wherefore didst thou stop short thus? Why not conclude the sentence that was half uttered? Oh! Flora—a terrible suspicion strikes me! Speak—relieve me from the cruel suspense under which I now labour: was it my sister—my much lamented sister who did thee that wrong?"

"I know not," replied Flora, weeping; "but—alas! pardon me, dear Francisco—if I suspect aught so bad of any one connected with thee—and yet heaven knows how freely, how sincerely I forgive my enemy—"

Her voice was lost in sobs; and her head drooped on her lover's breast.

"Weep not, dearest one!" exclaimed Francisco: "Let not our meeting be rendered mournful with tears. Thou knowest, perhaps, that Nisida disappeared as suddenly and as mysteriously as thou didst; but could she also have become the victim of the Carmelites? and did she alas! perish in the ruins of the convent?"

"I am well assured that the Lady Nisida was not doomed to that fate," answered Flora; "for had she been consigned to the convent, as a punishment for some real offence or on some groundless charge, she must have passed the ordeal of the Chamber of Penitence, where I should have seen her. Yes, Francisco—I have heard of her mysterious disappearance; and I have shed many—many tears when I have thought of her, poor lady! although," added the maiden, in a low and plaintive tone, "I fear, Francisco, that it was indeed she who doomed me to that monastic dungeon! Doubtless, her keen perception—far more keen than in those who are blessed with the faculties which were lost to her—enabled her to penetrate the secret of that affection with which you had honoured me, and in which I felt so much happiness—"

"I confessed my love to Nisida," interrupted Francisco: "but it was not until after your disappearance. I was driven to despair, Flora—I was mad with grief—and I could not, neither did I attempt to conceal my emotions. I told Nisida all, and well—oh! well—do I recollect the reply which she conveyed to me, giving fond assurance that my happiness should alone be conserved."

"Alas! was there no double meaning in that assurance?" asked Flora, gently. "The Lady Nisida knew well how inconsistent, with your high rank—your proud fortunes—your great name, was that love which you bore for a humble and obscure girl—"

"A love which I shall not be ashamed to declare in the presence of all Florence," exclaimed Francisco, in an impassioned tone. "But if Nisida were the cause of that cruel outrage on thee, my Flora, we will forgive her—for she could have acted only through conscientious, though most mistaken motives. Mistaken, indeed! for never, never could I have known happiness again, hadst thou not been restored to me! It was to wean my mind from pondering on afflictions which goaded me to despair, that I embarked in the cause of Christendom against the encroachments of Moslem power. Thinking that thou wast for ever lost to me—that my sister had also become the victim of some murderous hand,—harassed by doubts the most cruel, and uncertainty the most agonizing,—I sought death on the walls of Rhodes; but the destroying angel's arrow rebounded from my corselet—his sword was broken against my shield? During my voyage to Italy—after beholding the crescent planted on the walls where the Christian standard had floated for so many, many years—a storm overtook the ship: and yet

the destroying angel gave me not the death I courted. This evening I once more set foot in Florence. From my own mansion Nisida is still absent; and no tidings have been received of her. Alas! is she then lost to me for ever? Without tarrying even to change my travel-soiled garments, I set off to make inquiries concerning another whom I loved—and that other is thyself! Here, thanks to a merciful heaven! my heart has not been doomed to experience a second and equally cruel disappointment: for I have found thee at last, my Flora—and henceforth my arm shall protect thee from peril!"

"How have I deserved so much kindness at thine

bursting into tears; "but it was not my fault! On the night following the one in which the banditti stormed the convent, as I ere now detailed to your ears, I returned home to my aunt. When the excitement of our meeting was past, and when we were alone together, I threw myself at her feet, confessed all that had passed between thee and me, and implored her advice. 'Flora,' she said, while her tears fell upon me as I knelt, 'no happiness will come to thee, my child, from this attachment which has already plunged thee into so much misery. It is beyond all doubt certain that the relations of the Count were the authors of thy imprisonment: and their persecu-

"AND SHE POINTED TO A LOW OTTOMAN." (See p. 79.)

hands?" murmured the maiden, again drooping her blushing head. "And, oh! what will you think, Francisco—what will you say, when you learn that I was there—there at that cottage—with my aunt—when you called the last time to inquire if any tidings had been received of me—"

"You were there!" exclaimed Francisco, starting back in surprise not unmingled with anger: "you were there, Flora—and you knew that I was in despair concerning thee—that I would have given worlds to have heard of thy safety,—I, who thought that some fiend in human shape had sent thee to an early grave!"

"Forgive me, Francisco—forgive me!" cried Flora,

tions would only be removed were they to learn that the Count was made aware of your reappearance in Florence. For thy sake, then, my child, I shall suffer the impression of thy continued absence and loss to remain on the minds of those who may inquire concerning thee; and should his lordship call here again, most especially to him shall I appear stricken with grief on account of thee. His passion, my child, is one of boyhood—evanescent, though ardent while it endures. He will soon forget thee; and when he shall have learnt to love another, there will no longer be any necessity for thee to live an existence of concealment." Thus spoke my aunt, dear Francisco; and I dared not gainsay her. When you came the last time, I heard your

voice—I listened from my chamber door to all you said to my aunt—and I longed to fly into your arms. You went away—and my heart was nearly broken. Some days afterwards we learnt the strange disappearance of the Lady Nisida; and then I knew that you must have received a severe blow,—for I was well aware how much you loved her. Two or three weeks elapsed; and then we heard that you were about to depart to the wars. Oh! how bitter were the tears that I shed—how fervent were the prayers that I offered up for thy safety.”

“And those prayers have been heard on high, beloved one!” exclaimed Francisco, who had listened with melting heart and returning tenderness to the narrative which the maiden told so simply but so sincerely, and in the most plaintive tones of her musical voice.

“Can you forgive me now?” asked the blushing maiden, her swimming eyes bending on her lover glances eloquently expressive of hope.

“I have nothing to forgive, sweet girl,” replied Francisco. “Your aunt behaved with a prudence which in justice I cannot condemn; and you acted with an obedience and submission to your venerable relative, which I could not be arbitrary enough to blame. We have both endured much for each other, my Flora; but the days of our trials are passed; and your good aunt shall be convinced that in giving your young heart to me, you have not confided in one who is undeserving of so much love. Let us hasten into her presence. But one question have I yet to ask you,” he added, suddenly recollecting an idea which had ere now made some impression on his mind. “You informed me how you were liberated from the convent, and you mentioned the name of the Countess of Arestino, whom circumstances had made your companion in that establishment, and to whom your aunt gave an asylum. Know you not, dearest Flora, that fame reports not well of that same Gindia of Arestino—and that a woman of tarnished reputation is no fitting associate for an innocent and artless maiden such as thou?”

“During the period that the Lady of Arestino and myself were companions in captivity,” responded Flora, with a frankness as amiable as it was convincing, “she never in the most distant manner alluded to her love for the Marquis of Orain. When the Marquis appeared in the convent, in company with the robbers, I was far too much bewildered with the passing events, to devote a thought to what might be the nature of their connexion; and even when I had more leisure for reflection, during the entire day that I passed in the stronghold of the banditti, I was so much intent in it save what I conceived to be the bond of close relationship. I offered her ladyship an asylum at the house of my aunt, as I should have given a home, under such circumstances, to the veriest wretch crawling on the face of the earth. But in that cottage the Countess and myself have not continued in close companionship; for my aunt accidentally learnt that fame reported not well of the Lady of Arestino, and in a gentle manner she begged her to seek another house at her earliest leisure. The Countess implored my venerable relative to permit her to remain at the cottage, as her life would be in danger were she not afforded a sure and safe asylum. Moved by her earnest entreaties, my aunt assented; and the Countess has almost constantly remained in her own chamber. Sometimes—but very rarely—she goes forth after dusk, and in a deep disguise: the Marquis has not, however, visited the cottage since my aunt made that discovery relative to the reputation of the Lady of Arestino.”

“Thanks, charming Flora, for this explanation!” cried the young Count. “Let us now hasten to thine aunt; and in her presence will I renew to thee all the vows of unalterable and honourable affection which my heart suggests, as a means of proving that I am worthy of thy love.”

And, hand-in-hand, that fine young noble and that beauteous, blushing maiden proceeded to the cottage.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two persons, concealed in an adjacent grove, had overheard every syllable of the above conversation.

These were the valet Antonio, and his mother, Dame Margaretha, at whose dwelling, it will be recollected, the unfortunate Agnes had so long resided, under the protection of the late Count of Riverola.

“This is fortunate, mother!” said Antonio, when Francisco and Flora had retired from the vicinity of the grove. “You are spared the trouble of a visit to the old

Signora Francatelli; and I have heard sufficient to enable me to work out all my plans alike of aggrandizement and revenge. Let us retrace our way into the city; thou wilt return to thy home—and I shall thence straight to the Lord Count of Arestino.”

## CHAPTER LII.

### THE GREEK PAGE.—SONG OF THE GREEK PAGE.—A REVELATION.

THREE months had now elapsed since Ibrahim-Pacha had risen to the exalted rank of Grand Vizier, and had married the sister of Solymán the Magnificent. The Sultan daily became more attached to him; and he, on his part, rapidly acquired an almost complete influence over his Imperial Master. Vested with a power so nearly absolute that Solymán signed without ever perusing the hattî-sheriffs, or decrees, drawn up by Ibrahim,—and enjoying the confidence of the Divan, all the members of which were devoted to his interests,—the renegade administered according to his own discretion the affairs of that mighty empire. Avaricious and ever intent upon the aggrandizement of his own fortunes, he accumulated vast treasures; but he also maintained a household and lived in a style unequalled by any of his predecessors in office.

Having married a sister of the Sultan, he was not permitted a plurality of wives;—but he purchased the most beauteous slaves for his harem, and plunged headlong into a vortex of dissipation and pleasure.

For some weeks he had manifested the most ardent and impassioned attachment towards Aischa, who, during that period, was happy in the belief that she alone possessed his heart. But the customs of the East, as well as the duties of his office, kept them so much apart, that he had no leisure to discover the graces of her mind, nor to appreciate all the powers of her naturally fine and indeed well cultivated intellect; so that the beauty of her person constituted the only basis on which his affection was maintained. The fervour of such a love soon cooled with satiety; and those female slaves whom he had at first procured as indispensable appendages to his rank and station, were not long in becoming the sources of new pleasure and voluptuous enjoyment.

Aischa beheld his increasing indifference, and strove to bind him to her by representing all she had done for him. He listened coldly at first; but when, on several occasions, the same remonstrances were repeated, he answered angrily.

“Had it not been for my influence,” she said to him one day, when the dispute had become more serious than preceding quarrels of the kind, “you might still have been a humble Secretary to a Christian noble.”

“Not so,” replied the Grand Vizier; “for at the very time when I first beheld thee in the Bezestein, certain offers had been secretly conveyed to me from the Reis-Effendi.”

“In whose service you would have lingered as a mere subordinate for long, long years,” returned Aischa. “It was I who urged you on! Have I not often assured you that your image dwelt in my memory after the accident which first led to our meeting,—that one of my faithful women noticed my thoughtful mood,—and that when I confessed to her the truth, she stated to me that, by a strange coincidence, her own brother was employed by the Reis-Effendi as an agent to tempt you with the offers to which you have alluded? Then, inquiries which my slave instituted, brought to my ears the flattering tidings that you also thought of me—and I resolved to grant you an interview. From that moment my influence hurried you on to power; and when you became the favourite of the mighty Solymán, I confessed to him that I had seen and that I loved you. His fraternal attachment to me is great—greater than to any other of his sisters, seeing that himself and I were born of the same mother, though at a long interval. Thus was it that my persuasion made him think higher and oftener of you than he would else have done:—and now that you have attained the summit of glory and power, she who has helped to raise you is neglected and loved no longer.”

“Cease these reproaches, Aischa!” exclaimed Ibrahim, who had listened impatiently to her long address; “or I will give thee loss of my company than heretofore. See that the next time I visit thee, my reception may be with smiles instead of tears—with sweet words instead of reproaches.”

And in this cruel manner the heartless renegade quitted

his beauteous wife, leaving her plunged in the most profound affliction.

But as Ibrahim traversed the corridors leading to his own apartments, his heart smote him for the harshness and unfeeling nature of his conduct; and as one disagreeable idea, by disposing the spirits to melancholy, usually arouses others that were previously slumbering in the cells of the brain, all the turpitude of his apostasy was recalled with new force to his mind.

Repairing to a small but magnificently-furnished saloon in a retired part of the palace, he dismissed the slaves who were waiting at the door, ordering them, however, to send into his presence a young Greek page who had recently entered his service.

In a few minutes the youth made his appearance, and stood in a respectful attitude near the door.

"Come and sit at my feet, Constantine," said the Grand Vizier, "and thou shalt sing to me one of those airs of thy native Greece with which thou hast occasionally delighted mine ears. I know not how it is, boy—but thy presence pleases me, and thy voice soothes my soul, when oppressed with the cares of my high office."

Joy flashed from the bright black eyes of the young Greek page as he glided noiselessly over the thick carpet, and proceeded to place himself on a footstool near the sofa, whereon his master was reclining; but that emotion of pleasure was instantly subdued by the youth, and his countenance again became settled into an expression of the deepest deference.

"Proceed, Constantine," said the Grand Vizier; "and sing me that plaintive song which is supposed to depict the woes of one of the unhappy sons of Greece."

"But may not its sentiments offend your Highness," asked the page, speaking in a soft and even feminine tone—"seeing that they are unfriendly to the Moslem domination in Greece?"

"It is but a song, Constantine," responded Ibrahim. "I give thee full permission to sing those verses, and I should be sorry were you to subdue aught of the impassioned feelings which they are well calculated to excite within thee."

The page turned his strikingly handsome countenance up towards the Grand Vizier, and commenced in melodious, liquid tones, the following song:—

#### SONG OF THE GREEK PAGE.

##### I.

Oh! are there not beings condemned from their birth  
To drag without solace or hope, o'er the earth,

The burden of grief and sorrow?  
Doomed wretches who know, while they tremblingly  
say,

"The star of my fate appears brighter to-day,"  
That it is but a brief and a mocking ray  
To make darkness darker to-morrow.

##### II.

And 'tis not to the vilo and the base alone  
That unchanging grief and sorrow are known,

But as oft to the pure and guileless;  
And he, from whose fervid and generous lip  
Gush words of the kindest fellowship,  
Of the same pure fountain may not sip

In return, but is sad and smileless!

##### III.

Yes; such doomed mortals, alas! there be;  
And mine is that self-same destiny—

The fate of the lorn and lonely;  
For e'en in my early childhood's day,  
The comrades I sought would turn away;  
And of all the band from the sportive play  
Was I thrust and excluded only.

##### IV.

When fifteen summers had passed o'er my head,  
I stood on the battle-plain strewed with the dead,—

For the day of the Moslem's glory  
Had made me an orphan child—and there  
My sire was stretched—and his bosom bare  
Showed a gaping wound—and the flowing hair  
Of his head was damp and gory.

##### V.

My sire was the chief of the patriot band  
That had fought and died for their native land,  
When her rightful prince betrayed her:

On his kith and kin did the vengeance fall  
Of the Mussulman foe—and each and all  
Were swept from the old ancestral hall,  
Save myself, by the fierce invader.

##### VI.

And I was spared from that blood-stained grave  
To be dragged away as the Moslem's slave,

And bend to the foe victorious:  
But, O Greece! to thee does my memory turn  
Its longing eyes—and my heart-strings yearn  
To behold thee rise in thy might, and spurn,  
As of yore, the yoke inglorious!

##### VII.

But, oh! whither has Spartan courage fled:—  
And why, proud Athens! above thine head  
Is the Mussulman crescent gleaming?  
Have thine ancient memories no avail?  
And art thou not fired at the legend tale  
Which reminds thee how the whole world grew pale  
And recoiled from thy banners streaming?

"Enough, boy!" exclaimed Ibrahim; then, in a low tone, he murmured to himself, "The Christians have indeed much cause to anathematise the encroachments and tyranny of the Moslems."

There was a short pause, during which the Grand Vizier was absorbed in profound meditation, while the Greek page never once withdrew his eyes from the countenance of that high functionary.

"Boy," at length said Ibrahim, "you appear attached to me. I have observed many proofs of your devotion during the few months that you have been in my service. Speak—is there aught that I can do to make you happy? have you relations or friends who need protection? If they be poor I will relieve their necessities."

"My lips cannot express the gratitude which my heart feels towards your Highness," returned the page, a rich crimson glow suffusing itself over his olive countenance; "but I have no friends in behalf of whom I might supplicate the bounty of your Highness."

"Are you yourself happy, Constantine?" asked Ibrahim.

"Happy in being permitted to attend upon your Highness," was the reply, delivered in a soft and tremulous tone.

"But is it in my power to render you happier?" demanded the Grand Vizier.

Constantine hung down his head—reflected deeply for a few moments—and then murmured, "Yes."

"Then, by heaven!" exclaimed Ibrahim-Pacha, "thou hast only to name thy request, and it will be granted. I know not wherefore, but I am attached to thee much; I feel interested in thy welfare, and I would be rejoiced to minister to thy happiness."

"I am already happier than I was—happier, because mine ears have drunk in such kind words flowing from the lips of one who is exalted as highly as I am insignificant and humble," said the page, in a voice tremulous with emotions, but sweetly musical. "Yes—I am happier," he continued; "and yet my soul is filled with the image of a dear—a well-beloved sister, who pines in loneliness and solitude, ever dwelling on a hapless love which she has formed for one who knows not that he is so loved, and who perhaps may never—never know it."

"Ah! thou hast a sister, Constantine!" exclaimed the Grand Vizier. "And is she as lovely as the sister of a youth so handsome as thou art ought to be?"

"She has been assured by those who have sought her hand, that she is indeed beautiful," answered Constantine. "But of what avail are her charms, since he whom she loves may never whisper in her ear the delicious words, 'I love thee in return.'"

"Does the object of her affections possess so obdurate a heart?" inquired the Grand Vizier, strangely interested in the discourse of his youthful page.

"It is not that he scorns my sister's love," replied Constantine; "but it is that he knows not of its existence. It is true that he has seen her once—yet 'twere probable that he remembers not there is such a being in the world. Thus came it to pass, my lord.—An officer, holding a high rank in the service of his Imperial Majesty, the great Solyman, had occasion to visit a humble dwelling wherein my sister resided. She—poor silly maiden! was so struck by his god-like beauty—so dazzled by his fascinating address—so enchanted by the sound of his voice, that she surrendered up her heart



suddenly and secretly—surrendered it beyond all power of reclamation. Since then she has never ceased to ponder upon this fatal passion—this unhappy love: she has nursed his image in her mind, until her reason has rocked with the wild thoughts, the ardent hopes, the emotions of despair—all the conflicting sentiments and feelings, in a word, which so ardent and so strange a love must naturally engender. Enthusiastic, yet tender—fervent, yet melting is her soul; and while she does not attempt to close her eyes to the conviction that she is cherishing a passion which is preying upon her very vitals, she, nevertheless, clings to it as a martyr to the stake! Oh! my lord, canst thou marvel if I feel deeply for my unhappy sister?"

"But wherefore doth she remain thus unhappy?" demanded Ibrahim-Pacha. "Surely, there are means of conveying to the object of her attachment an intimation how deeply he is beloved? and he must be something more than human," he added, in an impassioned tone, "if he can remain obdurate to the tears and sighs of a beauteous creature, such as thy sister doubtless is."

"And were he to spurn her from him—Oh! your Highness, it would kill her!" said the page, fixing his large, eloquent eyes upon the countenance of the Grand Vizier. "Consider his exalted rank and her humble position—"

"Doth she aspire to become his wife?" asked Ibrahim. "She would be contented to serve him as his veriest slave," responded Constantine, now strangely excited, "were he but to look kindly upon her: she would deem herself blessed in receiving a smile from his lips, so long as it was bestowed as a reward for all the tender love she bears him."

"Who is this man that is so fortunate as to have excited so profound an interest in the heart of one so beautiful?" demanded the Grand Vizier. "Name him to me—I will order him to appear before me—and, for thy sake, Constantine, I will become an eloquent pleader on behalf of thy sister."

Words cannot express the joy which flashed from the eyes of the page, and animated his handsome though softly feminine countenance, as, casting himself on his knees at the feet of Ibrahim-Pacha, he murmured, "Great lord, that man whom my sister loves, and for whom she would lay down her life, is thyself."

Ibrahim was for some minutes too much overcome by astonishment to offer an observation—to utter a word; while the page remained kneeling at his feet.

Then suddenly it flashed to the mind of the Grand Vizier that the only humble abode which he had entered since he had become an officer holding a high rank in the service of Solymán, was that of his Greek emissary, Demetrius; and it now occurred to him, for the first time, that there was a striking likeness between the young page and the beautiful Calanthe, whom he had seen on that occasion.

"Constantine," he said at length, "art thou, then, the brother of that Demetrius whom I despatched three months ago to Florence?"

"I am, my lord—and 'tis our sister Calanthe of whom I have spoken," was the reply. "Oh! pardon my arrogance—by presumption, great Vizier!" he continued, suddenly rising from his kneeling position, and now standing with his arms meekly folded across his breast—"pardon the arrogance, the insolence of my conduct," he exclaimed, "but it was for the sake of my sister that I sought service in the household of your Highness. I thought that if I could succeed in gaining your notice—if in any way I could obtain such favour in your eyes, as to be admitted to speak with one so highly raised above me as thou art, I fancied that some opportunity would enable me to make those representations which have issued from my lips this day. How patiently I have waited that occasion, heaven knows how ardent have been my hopes of success when from time to time your Highness singled me out from amongst the numerous free pages of your princely household to attend upon your privacy—how ardently I say, these hopes have been, your Highness may possibly divine! And now, my lord, that I have succeeded in gaining your attention, and pouring this secret into your ears, I will away to Calanthe and impart all the happiness that is in store for her. Though the flowers may hold up their heads high in the light of the glorious sun, yet she shall hold her higher in the favour of your smile! Generous master," he added, suddenly sinking his voice to a lower tone, and reassuming the deferential air which he had partially lost in the excitement of speaking, "permit me now to depart."

"This evening, Constantine," said the Grand Vizier, fixing his dark eyes significantly upon the page, "let your sister enter the harem by the private door in the garden. Here is a key: I will give the necessary instructions to the female slaves to welcome her."

Constantine received the key, made a low obeisance, and withdrew, leaving the Grand Vizier to feast his voluptuous imagination with delicious thoughts of the beauteous Calanthe.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### THE SULTANA-VALIDA.—THE THREE BLACK SLAVES.

In the meantime the Princess Aischa, the now neglected wife of the Grand Vizier, had repaired to the imperial seraglio to obtain an interview with her brother, Solymán the Magnificent.

The Sultan, as the reader has already learnt, was deeply attached to Aischa. Their mother, the Sultana-Valida, or Empress-Mother, was still alive, and occupied apartments in the seraglio. Her children entertained the greatest respect for her; and her influence over the Sultan, who possessed an excellent heart, though his sway was not altogether unstained by cruelties, was known to be great.

It was therefore to her mother and her brother that the beautiful Aischa proceeded; and when she was alone with them in the Valida's apartment, and removed her veil, they immediately noticed that she had been weeping.

Upon being questioned relative to the cause of her sorrow, she burst into an agony of tears, and was for some time unable to reply.

At length, half regretting that she had taken the present step, Aischa slowly revealed the various causes of complaint against the Grand Vizier.

"By Allah!" exclaimed the Sultan "the ungrateful Ibrahim shall not thus spurn and neglect the costly gift which I, his master, condescended to bestow upon him! What! when the Shah of Persia, the Khan of the Tartars, and the Prince of Karamania all sought thine hand, and despatched ambassadors laden with rich gifts to our Court to demand thee in marriage, did I not send them back with cold words of denial to their sovereigns? And was it to bestow thee, my sister, on this ungrateful boy, who was so late naughty save a dog of a Christian, ready to eat the dirt under our imperial feet,—was it to bestow thee on such an onion Shah? By the tomb of the Prophet! this indignity shall cease!"

"Restrain your wrath, my son," said the Sultana-Valida, "Ibrahim must not be openly disgraced: the effects of his punishment would rebound on our beloved Aischa. No—rather entrust this affair to me, and fear not that I shall fail in compelling this haughty Pacha to return to the arms of his wife—aye, and implore her pardon for his late neglect."

"Oh! dearest mother, if thou canst accomplish this!" exclaimed Aischa, her countenance becoming animated with joy and her heart palpitating with hope, "thou wouldst render me happy indeed!"

"Trust to me, daughter," replied the Sultana Valida. "In the meantime seek not to earn my intentions; but, on thy return home, send me by some trusty slave thy pass-key to the harem. And thou, my son, wilt lend me thine imperial signet-ring for twelve hours."

"Remember," said the Sultan, as he drew the jewel from his finger, "that he who bears that ring possesses a talisman of immense power—a sign which none to whom it is shown dares disobey: remember this, my mother, and use it with caution."

"Fear not, my dearly beloved son," answered the Sultana-Valida, concealing the ring in her bosom. "And now, Aischa, do you return to the palace of your haughty husband, who, ere twelve hours be passed, shall sue for pardon at thy feet."

The Sultan and Aischa both knew that their mother was a woman of powerful intellect and determined character; and they sought not to penetrate into the secret of her intentions.

Solymán withdrew to preside at a meeting of the Divan; and Aischa returned to the palace of the Grand Vizier, attended by the slaves who had waited for her in an anteroom leading to her mother's apartments.

It was now late in the afternoon and the time for evening prayer had arrived ere the Sultana-Valida received the pass-key to Ibrahim-Pacha's harem. But the moment it was conveyed to her, she summoned to her

presence three black slaves belonging to the corps of the Bostandjis, or gardeners, who also served as executioners when a person of rank was to be subjected to the process of the bow-string, or when any dark deed was to be accomplished in silence and with caution. Terrible appendages to the household of Ottoman Sultans were the black slaves belonging to that corps:—like snakes, they insinuated themselves, noiselessly and ominously, into the presence of their victims; and it were as vain to preach peace to the warring elements which God alone can control as to implore mercy at the hands of those remorseless Ethiopians!

To the three black slaves did the Sultana-Valida issue her commands; and to the eldest she entrusted Solyman's signet-ring and the pass-key which Aïsha had sent her.

The slaves bowed three times to the Empress-Mother—laid their hands on their heads to imply that they would deserve decapitation if they neglected the orders they had received—and then withdrew.

There was something terribly sinister in their appearance as they retired noiselessly but rapidly through the long, silent, and darkened corridors of the imperial harem.

It was night—and the moon shone softly and brightly upon the mighty city of Constantinople, tipping each of its thousand spires and pinnacles as with a star.

Ibrahim-Pacha, having disposed of the business of the day, and now with his imagination full of the beautiful Calanthe, hastened to the anderoon, or principal apartment of the harem.

The harem, occupying one complete wing of the Visier's palace, consisted of three storeys. On the ground floor were the apartments of the Princess Aïsha and her numerous female dependants. These opened from a spacious marble hall; and at the folding-doors leading into them were stationed two black dwarfs, who were deaf and dumb. Their presence was not in any way derogatory to the character of Aïsha, but actually denoted the superior rank of the lady who occupied those apartments in respect to the numerous females who tenanted the rooms above. As she was the sister of the Sultan, Ibrahim dared not appear in her presence without obtaining her previous assent through the medium of one of the mutes, who were remarkably keen in understanding and conveying intelligence by means of signs. A grand marble staircase led from the hall to the two floors containing the apartments of the ladies of the harem; and thus, though Aïsha dwelt in the same wing as those females, her own abode was as distinct from theirs as if she were the tenant of a separate house altogether.

On the first floor there was a large and magnificently furnished room, in which the ladies of the harem were accustomed to assemble when they chose to quit the solitude of their own chambers for the enjoyment of each other's society. The ceiling of the anderoon, as this immense apartment was called, was gilt entirely over: it was supported by twenty slender columns of crystal; and the splendid chandeliers which were suspended to it diffused a soft and mellow light, producing the most striking effects on that mass of gilding, those reflecting columns, and the wainscoted walls inlaid with mother-of-pearl and with ivory of different colours. A Persian carpet, three inches thick, was spread upon the floor. Along two opposite sides ran continuous sofas, supported by low white marble pillars, and covered with purple figured velvet, fringed with gold. In the middle of this gorgeous apartment was a large table, shaped like a crescent, and spread with all kinds of preserved fruits, confectionery, cakes, and delicious beverages of a non-alcoholic nature.

The room was crowded with beautiful women when the presence of Ibrahim was announced by a slave. There were the fair-complexioned daughters of Georgia—the cold, reserved, but lovely Circassians—the warm and impassioned Persians—the voluptuous Wallachians—the timid Tartars—the dusky Indians—the talkative Turkish ladies—beauties, too, of Italy, Spain, and Portugal, indeed, specimens of female perfection from many, many nations. Their various styles of beauty and their characteristic national dresses formed a scene truly delightful to gaze upon: but the Grand Vizier noticed none of the countenances so anxiously turned towards him to mark on which his eyes would settle in preference; and the ladies noiselessly withdrew, leaving their master alone with the slave in the anderoon.

Ibrahim threw himself on a sofa, and gave some hasty instructions to the slave, who immediately retired.

In about a quarter of an hour he came back, conducting into the anderoon a lady veiled from head to foot.

The slave then withdrew altogether; and Ibrahim approached the lady, saying, "Calanthe—beautiful Calanthe! welcome to my palace!"

She removed her veil; and Ibrahim fixed his eager eyes upon the countenance thus disclosed to him:—but he was immediately struck by the marvellous resemblance existing between his page Constantine and the charming Calanthe.

It will be remembered that when he called, in a mean disguise, at the abode of Demetrius, he saw Calanthe for the first time, and only for a short period; and though he was even then struck by her beauty, yet the impression it made was but momentary: and he had so far forgotten Calanthe as never to behold in Constantine the least resemblance to any one whom he had seen before.

But now that Calanthe's countenance burst upon him in all the glory of its superb Greek beauty, that resemblance struck upon him with all the force of a new idea; and he was about to express his astonishment that so wondrous a likeness should subsist even between brother and sisters when the maid sank at his feet, exclaiming, "Pardon me, great Vizier!—but Constantine and Calanthe are one and the same being!"

"Methought the brother pleaded with marvellous eloquence on behalf of his sister," said Ibrahim, with a smile; and raising Calanthe from her suppliant posture, he led her to a seat, gazing on her the while with eyes expressive of intense passion.

"Your Highness," observed the maiden, after a short pause, "has heard from my own lips how profound is the attachment which I have dared to conceive for you—how great is the admiration I entertain for the brilliant powers of your intellect. To be with thee, great Ibrahim! will I abandon country, friends—aye, and even creed, shouldst thou demand that concession; for in thee—and in thee only—are all my hopes of happiness now centred!"

"And those hopes shall not be disappointed, dearest Calanthe!" exclaimed Ibrahim, clasping her in his arms. "But a few minutes before you entered this room, a hundred women—the choicest flowers of all climes—were gathered here;—and yet I value one smile on thy lips more than all the tender endearments that those purchased hours could bestow. For thy love was unbought,—it was a love that prompted thee to attach thyself in a mental capacity to my person—"

The impassioned language of the Grand Vizier was suddenly interrupted by the opening of the door; and three black slaves glided into the anderoon—half crouching as they stole along—and fixing on the beautiful Calanthe, eyes, the dark pupils of which seemed to glare horribly from the whites in which they were set.

"Dogs! what signifies this intrusion?" exclaimed Ibrahim-Pacha, starting from the sofa, and grasping the handle of his scimitar.

The chief of the three slaves uttered not a word of reply, but exhibited the imperial signet-ring, and at the same time unrolled from the coil which he had hitherto held in his hand a long green silken bow-string.

At that ominous spectacle Ibrahim fell back, his countenance becoming ashy pale, and his frame trembling with an icy shudder from head to foot.

"Choose between this and her," whispered the slave, in a deep tone, as he first glanced at the bow-string and then looked towards Calanthe, who knew that some terrible danger was impending, but was unable to divine where or when it was to fall.

"Merciful Allah!" exclaimed the Grand Vizier; and, throwing himself upon the floor, he buried his face in his hands.

In another moment Calanthe was seized and gagged, before even a word or scream could escape her lips; but Ibrahim heard the rustling of her dress as she unavailingly struggled with the monsters in whose power she was.

The selfish ingrate! he drew not his scimitar to defend her—he no longer remembered all the tender love she bore him; but, appalled by the menace of the bow-string, backed by the warrant of the Sultan's signet-ring, he lay grovelling on the rich Persian carpet, giving vent to his alarms by low and piteous moans.

Then he heard the door once more close as softly as possible:—he looked up—glared with wild anxiety around—and breathed more freely on finding himself alone!

For the Ethiopians had departed with their victim!

Slowly rising from his supine posture, Ibrahim approached the table, filled a crystal cup with sherbet to the brim, and drank the cooling beverage which seemed to go hissing down his parched throat—so dreadful was the thirst which the horror of the scene just enacted had produced.

Then the sickening as well as maddening conviction struck to his very soul, that though the envious and almost worshipped Vizier of a mighty empire,—having authority of life and death over millions of human beings, and able to dispose of the governments and patronage of huge provinces and mighty cities,—he was but a miserable helpless slave in the eyes of another greater still—an ephemeron whom the breath of Solomon the Magnificent could destroy!

And overcome by the conviction, he threw himself on the sofa, bursting into an agony of tears,—tears of mingled rage and woe.

Yes; the proud—the selfish—the haughty renegade wept as bitterly as ever a poor weak woman was known to weep!

How calm and beautiful lay the waters of the Golden Horn beneath the light of that lovely moon which shone so chastely and so serenely above,—as if pouring its argent lustre upon a world where no evil passions were known—no hearts were stained with crime—no iniquity of human imaginings was in course of perpetration.

But, ah! what sound is that which breaks on the silence of the night?

Is it the splash of oars? No—for the two black slaves who guide your boat which has shot out from the shore into the centre of the gulf, are resting on the slight sculls—the boat itself too, is now stationary—and not a ripple is stirred by its grotesquely-shaped prow.

What then was that sound?

'Twas the voice of agony bursting from woman's throat; and that boat is about to become the scene of a deed of horror, though one of frequent—alas! too frequent—occurrence in that clime, and especially on that gulf.

The gag has slipped from Calanthe's mouth: and a long, loud scream of agonizing despair sweeps over the surface of the water—rending the calm and moonlit air—but dying away ere it can raise an echo on either shore.

Strong are the arms and relentless is the heart of the black monster who has now seized the unhappy Greek maiden in his ferocious grasp—while the lustre of the pale orb of night streams on that countenance lately radiant with impassioned hope, but now convulsed with indescribable horror.

Again the scream bursts from the victim's lips; but its thrilling, cutting agony is interrupted by a sudden plunge—a splash—a gurgling and rippling of the waters—and the corpse of the murdered Calanthe is borne towards the deeper and darker bosom of the Bosphorus.

The sun was already dispersing the orient mists when the chief of the three black slaves once more stood in the presence of the Grand Vizier, who had passed the night in the anderoon, alone and a prey to the most lively mental tortures,

So noiselessly and reptile-like did the hideous Ethiopian steal into the apartment, that he was within a yard of the Grand Vizier ere the latter was aware that the door had been opened.

Ibrahim started as if from a snake about to spring upon him—for the ominous bow-string swung negligently from the slave's hand, and the imperial signet still glistered on his finger.

"Mighty Pacha!" spoke the Ethiopian, in a low and cold tone; "thus saith the Sultana-Valida:—'Cease to treat thy loving wife with neglect. Hasten to her—throw thyself at her feet—implore her pardon for the past—and give her hope of affection for the future. Shouldst thou neglect this warning, then every night will the rival whom thou preferest to her, be torn from thine arms, and be devoted as food for the fishes. She whom thou didst so prefer this night that is passed, sleeps in the dark green bed of the Bosphorus. Take warning, Pacha; for the bow-string may be used at last. Moreover, see that thou revealest not to the Princess Aischa the incident of the night, nor the nature of the threats which send thee back repentant to her arms.'"

And with these words the slave glided hastily from the room, leaving the Grand Vizier a prey to feelings of ineffable horror.

His punishment on earth had begun—and he knew it!

What had his ambition gained? What had his apostasy accomplished? Though rich, invested with high rank, and surrounded by every luxury, he was more wretched than the meanest slave who was accustomed to kiss the dust at his feet!

But subduing the fearful agitation which oppressed him—composing his feelings and his countenance as well as he was able—the proud and haughty Ibrahim hastened to implore admittance to his wife's chamber; and when the boon was accorded, and he found himself in her presence, he besought her pardon in a voice and with a manner expressive of the most humiliating penitence!

Thus, at the moment when thousands—perhaps millions were envying the bright fortunes and glorious destinies of Ibrahim the Happy, as he was denominated—the dark and terrible despotism of the Sultana-Valida made him tremble for his life, and compelled him to sue at Aischa's feet for pardon.

And if, at that instant of his crushed spirit and wounded pride, there were a balm found to soothe the racking fibres of his heart, the anodyne consisted in the tender love which Aischa manifested towards him, and the touching sincerity with which she assured him of her complete forgiveness.

## CHAPTER LIV.

### NISIDA AND WAGNER ON THE ISLAND.—THE INCANTATION.

RETURN we again to that Mediterranean Island on which Fernand Wagner and the beautiful Nisida espoused each other by solemn vows plighted in the face of heaven, and where they have now resided for six long months.

At first how happy—how supremely happy was Nisida,—having tutored herself so far to forget the jarring interests of that world which lay beyond the sea, as to abandon her soul without reservation to the delights of the new existence on which she had entered.

Enabled once more to use that charming voice which God had given her, but which had remained hushed for so many years,—able also to listen to the words that fell from the lips of her lover, without being forced to subdue and crush the emotions which they excited,—and secure in the possession of him to whom she was so madly devoted and who manifested such endearing tenderness towards herself,—Nisida indeed felt as if she were another being, or endowed with the lease of a new life.

And at first, too, how much had Wagner and Nisida to say to each other,—how many fond assurances to give—how many protestations of unalterable affection to make! For hours would they sit together upon the seashore, or on the bank of the limpid stream in the valley, and converse almost unceasingly,—wearying not of each other's discourse, and sustaining the interest and enjoyment of that interchange of thoughts by flying from topic to topic just as their unslackened imaginations suggested.

But Fernand never questioned Nisida concerning the motive which had induced her to feign dumbness and deafness for so many years; she had given him to understand that family reasons of the deepest importance, and involving dreadful mysteries from the contemplation of which she recoiled in horror, had prompted so tremendous a self-martyrdom;—and he loved her too well to outrage her feelings by urging her to touch more than she might choose on that topic.

Careful not to approach the vicinity of large trees, for fear of those dreadful tenants of the isle who might be said to divide its sovereignty with them, the lovers—may we not venture to call them husband and wife?—would ramble, hand-in-hand, along the stream's enchanting banks, in the calm hours of moonlight which lent softer charms to the scene than when the gorgeous sun bathed all in gold.

Or else they would wander on the sands, to the musical murmur of the rippling sea,—their arms clasping each other's necks—their eyes exchanging glances of fondness—horns of ardent passion, his of more melting tenderness.

But there was too much sensuality in the disposition of Nisida to render her love for Wagner sufficient and powerful enough to ensure permanent contentment with her present lot.

The first time that the fatal eve drew near when he must exchange the shape of a man for that of a horrible wolf, he had said to her, "Beloved Nisida, I remember

that there are finer and different fruits on the other side of the island, beyond the range of mountains; and I should rejoice to obtain for thee a variety. Console thyself for a few hours during mine absence: and on my return we shall experience renewed and increased happiness, as if we were meeting again after a long separation." Vainly did Nisida assure him that she recked not for a more extensive variety of fruits than those which the nearest grove yielded, and that she would rather have his society than all the luxuries which his absence and return might bring her: he overruled her remonstrances—and she at length permitted him to depart. Then he crossed the mountains by means of the path which he had descried when he escaped from the torrent at the point where the tree stretched across the stream, as described in a preceding chapter; and on the other side of the range of hills he fulfilled the fearful destiny of the Wehr-Wolf! On his return to Nisida—after an absence of nearly twenty-four hours, for the time occupied in crossing and re-crossing the mountains was considerable—he found her gloomy and pensive. His long absence had vexed her; she, in the secrecy of her own heart, had already felt a craving for a change of scene—and she naturally suspected it was to gratify a similar want that Fernand had undertaken the transmontane journey. She received his fruits coldly; and it was some time ere he could succeed in winning her back to perfect good humour.

The next interval of a month glided away: the little incident which had for a moment ruffled the harmony of their lives, was forgotten—at least by Nisida;—and so devoted was Fernand in his attention, so tenderly sincere in his attachment towards her,—and so joyful, too, was she in the possession of one whose masculine beauty was almost superhumanly great,—those incipient cravings for change of scene—those nascent longings for a return to the great and busy world, returned but seldom and were even then easily subdued in her breast.

When the second fatal date of their union on the island approached, Wagner was compelled to urge some new, though necessarily trivial excuse for again crossing the mountains; and Nisida's remonstrances were more authoritative and earnest than on the previous occasion. Nevertheless, he succeeded in obtaining her consent; but during his absence of four or five and twenty hours, the lady had ample leisure to ponder on home—the busy world across the sea—and her well-beloved brother Francisco. Fernand, when he came back, found her gloomy and reserved: then as he essayed to wean her from her dark thoughts she responded petulantly, and even reproachfully.

The ensuing month glided not away so happily as the two former ones: and though Fernand's attentions and manifestations of fondness increased, if possible, still Nisida would frequently sigh, and look wistfully at the sea, as if she would have joyed to behold a sail in the horizon.

The third time the fatal close of the month drew nigh, Wagner knew not how to act: but some petulance on the part of Nisida furnished him with an excuse to which his generous heart only had recourse with the deepest—the keenest anguish. Throwing back the harsh words at her whom he loved so devotedly, he exclaimed, "Nisida, I leave thee for a few hours until thy good humour shall have returned;" and, without waiting for a reply, he darted towards the mountains. For some time the lady remained seated gloomily upon the sand; but as hour after hour passed away, and the sun went down, and the moon gathered power to light the enchanting scene of landscape and of sea, she grew uneasy and restless. Throughout that night she wandered up and down on the sands, now weeping at the thought that she herself had been unkind—then angry at the conviction that Fernand was treating her more harshly than she deserved.

It was not until the sun was high in the heavens that Wagner re-appeared; and though Nisida was in reality delighted to find all her wild alarms, in which the monstrous snakes of the isle entered largely, thus completely dissipated,—yet she concealed the joy which she experienced in beholding his safe return, and received him with gloomy hauteur.

Oh! how her conduct went to Wagner's heart! for he knew that, so long as the direful necessity which had compelled his absence remained unexplained, Nisida was justified in attributing the absence to unkind feelings and motives on his part. A thousand times that day was he on the point of throwing himself at her feet, and revealing all the details of his frightful destiny: but he

dared not—oh! no, he dared not;—and a profound melancholy seized upon his soul.

Nisida now relented—chiefly because she herself felt miserable by the contemplation of his unhappiness: and harmony was restored between them.

But during the fourth month of their union, the lady began to speak more frequently and frankly of the weariness and the monotony of their present existence; and when Fernand essayed to console her, she responded only by deep-drawn sighs. His love was based on those enduring elements which would have rendered him content to dwell for ever with Nisida on that island, which had no sameness for him so long as she was there to be his companion: but her love subsisted rather sensually than mentally; and now that her fierce and long pent-up desires had experienced gratification, she longed to return to the land of her birth, to embrace her brother Francisco—yes, even though she should be again compelled to simulate the deaf and dumb!

The close of the fourth month was now at hand, and Wagner was at a loss how to act. New excuses for a fresh absence were impossible; and it was with a heart breaking with anguish, that he was compelled to seize an opportunity in the afternoon of the last day of the month, to steal away from Nisida, and hasten across the mountain. Oh! what would she think of his absence now?—an absence for which he had not prepared her, and which was not on this occasion justified by any petulance or wilfulness on her part? The idea was maddening, but there was no alternative!

It was noon on the ensuing day when Fernand Wagner, pale and careworn, again sought that spot on the strand where the rudely-constructed cottage stood: but Nisida was not within the hut. He roved along the shore to a considerable distance, but still he beheld her not. Terrible alarms now oppressed him. Could she have done some desperate deed to rid herself of an existence whereof she was weary? or had some fatal accident befallen her?

From the shore he hastened to the valley; and there, seated by the side of the crystal stream, he beheld the object of his search. He ran—he flew towards her; but she seemed not to observe him; and when he caught a glimpse of her countenance, he shrank back in dismay—it was so pale, and yet so expressive of deep, concentrated rage!

But we cannot linger on this portion of our tale. Suffice it to say that Wagner exerted all his eloquence, all his powers of persuasion to induce Nisida to turn a kind glance upon him; and it was only when, goaded to desperation by her stern silence and her implacable mien, he exclaimed, "Since I am no longer worthy of even a look or a syllable, I will quit thee for ever!"—it was only when these words conveyed to Nisida a frightful menace of loneliness, that she relented and gradually suffered herself to be appeased. But vainly did she question him relative to the cause of his absence on this occasion: he offered a variety of excuses, and she believed none of them.

The month that followed was characterized by many quarrels and disputes; for Nisida's soul acquired all that restlessness which had marked it ere she was thrown on the island, but which solitude at first, and then the possession of Wagner, had for a time so greatly subdued.

Nevertheless, there were still occasions when she would cling to Wagner with all the confiding fondness of one who remembered how he had saved her life from the hideous anaconda, and who looked up to him as her only joy and solace in that clime the beauty of which became painful with its monotony:—yes, she would cling to him as they roved along the sands together—she would gaze up into his countenance—and, as she read assurances of the deepest affection in his fine dark eyes, she would exclaim rapturously, "Oh! how handsome—how god-like art thou, my Fernand! Pardon me—pardon me, that I should ever have nursed resentment against thee!"

It was when she was in such a mood as this, that he murmured in her ears, "Nisida, dearest, thou hast thy secret which I have never sought to penetrate. I also have my secret, beloved one, as I hinted to thee on that day which united us in this island; and into that mystery of mine thou mayst not look. But at certain intervals I must absent myself from thee for a few hours, as I hitherto have done; and on my return, O dearest Nisida! let me not behold that glorious countenance of thine clouded with anger and with gloom!"

Then ere she could utter a word of reply, he sealed her lips with kisses—he pressed her fervently to his heart—

and at that moment she thought he seemed so divinely handsome, and she felt so proud of possessing the love of a man invested with such superhuman beauty and such a splendid intellect, that she attempted not a remonstrance nor a complaint against words which were but the preface to a fifth absence of four-and-twenty hours.

And when Fernand Wagner re-appeared again, his Nisida hastened to meet him, as he descended from the mountains,—those mountains which were crossed even by a sure-footed and agile man with so much difficulty, and which he knew it would be impossible for him to traverse during that mad career in which he was monthly doomed to whirl along in his lupine shape;—yes, she hurried to meet him—received him with open arms—smiled tenderly upon him—and led him to the sea-shore, where she had spread the noon-day meal in the most inviting manner.

The unwearied and unchanging nature of his love had touched her heart; and, during the long hours of his fifth absence, she had reasoned with herself on the folly of marring the sweet harmony which should prevail between the only two human tenants of the island.

The afternoon passed more happily than many and many a previous day had done; Nisida thought that Fernand had never seemed so handsome, though he was somewhat pale—and Wagner fancied that his companion had never appeared so magnificently beautiful as now, while she lay half reclining in his arms, the rays of the setting sun faintly illuminating her aquiline countenance, and giving a glossy richness to the luxuriant black hair which floated negligently over her naked shoulders.

When the last beams of the orb of day died flickering in the far horizon, the tender pair retired to their hut, rejoicing in the serene and happy way in which the last few hours had glided over their heads.

Sleep was upon their eyelids as they lay in each other's arms,—the island and the sea were sleeping too in the soft light of the silver moon and the countless stars which gemmed the vault of heaven,—when a dark figure passed along the sand and stopped at a short distance from the door of the rudely-constructed tenement.

And assuredly this was no mortal being—nor were it now a mortal shape: but Satan—in all the horrors of his ugliness, though still invested with that sublimity of mien which marked the fallen angel,—Satan, clothed in terrors ineffable, it was!

For a few moments he stood contemplating the hut wherein the sleepers lay,—dread lightnings flashed from his eyes—and the forked electric fluid seemed to play around his haughty brow—while his fearful countenance, the features of which no human pen may venture to describe, expressed malignant hate, anticipated triumph, and tremendous scorn.

Then, extending his right hand towards the hut, and speaking in that deep sonorous tone which, when heard by mortal ears, seemed to jar against the very soul, he chanted the following incantation:—

“Woman of wild and fierce desires!  
Why languish thus the wonted fires  
That armed thine heart, and nerved thine hand  
To do whate'er thy firmness plann'd?  
Has maudlin love subdued thy soul,  
Once so impatient of control?  
Has amorous play enslaved thy mind  
Which erst no common chains confined?  
Has tender dalliance power to kill  
Thy wild, indomitable will?  
No more must love thus paralyze  
And crush thine iron energies;  
No more must maudlin passion stay  
Thy despot soul's remorseless sway:  
Henceforth thy lips shall cease to smile  
Upon the beauties of this isle;  
Henceforth thy mental glance shall roam,  
Over the Mediterranean foam,  
Towards thy far-off Tuscan home!  
Alarms for young Francisco's steal  
And doubts to thy breast will steal;  
While retrospection carries back  
Thy mem'ry o'er Time's beaten track,  
And stops at that dread hour when thou,  
With burning eyes, and flushing brow,  
Call'd heaven to hear the solemn vow  
Dictated with the latest breath  
Of thy fond mother on th' untimely bed of death!”

Thus spoke the Demon; and, having chanted the in-

cantation, full of menace and of deep design, he turned to depart.

Sleep was still upon the eyelids of Fernand and Nisida as they lay in each other's arms, the island and the sea, too, were still sleeping in the soft light of the silver moon and the countless stars which gemmed the vault of heaven,—when the dark figure passed along the sand, away from the rudely-constructed tenement!

## CHAPTER LV.

### THE FIRST EFFECTS OF THE INCANTATION.

WHEN the sun rose again from the orient wave, Fernand repaired to the grove, as was his wont, to gather fruits for the morning repast,—while Nisida bathed her fair form in the waters of the Mediterranean.

But there was a gloom upon the lady's brow, and there was a sombre flashing in her large dark eyes, which denoted an incipient conflict of emotions stirring within her breast.

She had retired to rest, as we have seen, on the previous evening, with a heart glowing towards her beloved and handsome Fernand,—she had fallen asleep with the tender sounds of his musical yet manly voice in her ears, and the image of his beautiful countenance in her mind:—but in the night—she knew not at what hour—strange dreams began to oppress her—ominous visions filled her with anxiety.

It seemed as if some being, having right to reproach and power to taunt, whispered to her as she slept stern remonstrances against the idle, voluptuous, and dreaming life she was leading,—mocking her for passing her time in the maudlin delights of love,—calling upon her to arouse her latent energies and shake off that luxurious lethargy, teaching her to look upon the island, beauteous though it were, as one vast prison in which she was confined, from whence there was nevertheless means of escape,—raising up before her mental vision all the most alluring and bustling scenes of her own native city of Florence,—then bitterly reproaching her for having allowed her soul to be more wrapped up in the society of Fernand Wagner, than solicitous, as it was wont to be, for the welfare of her brother Francisco,—creating, too, wild doubt in her imagination as to whether circumstances might not after all have united her brother and Flora Francatelli in the bonds of a union which for many reasons she abhorred,—and lastly, thundering in her ears the terrible accusation that she was perjured to a solemn and an awful vow pledged by her lips, on a dread occasion, and to the dictating voice of her dying mother!

When she awoke in the morning, her brain appeared to be in confusion;—but as her thoughts gradually settled themselves in the various cells of the seat of memory, the entire details of her long dream assumed the semblance of a connected chain, even as we have just described them.

For those thoughts had arisen in the nature and the order commanded by the Demon!

Fernand Wagner saw that the mind of his lovely companion—his charming bride—was ruffled; and as he embraced her tenderly, he inquired the cause. His caresses for the moment soothed her, and induced her to struggle against the ideas which oppressed her;—for there are no thoughts that Satan excites within us, which we cannot wrestle with—aye, and conquer, if we will!

Finding that Nisida became more composed, and that she treated her mournfulness and her agitation merely as the results of a disagreeable dream, Fernand rose—hastened to perform his own ablutions—and then repaired to the adjacent grove, as above stated.

But Nisida remained not long in the Mediterranean's mighty bath: the moment Wagner had departed from her presence, the thoughts which had so recently passed in sad procession through her brain, came back with renewed vigour—forcing themselves as it were upon her contemplation, because she offered but a feeble resistance to their returning invasion.

And as she stood on the shore, having donned her scant clothing, and now combing out her long, luxuriant hair, to the silken riches of which the salt water lent a more glorious gloss,—she became a prey to an increasing restlessness—an augmenting anxiety—a longing to quit that island and an earnest desire to behold her brother Francisco once again,—sentiments and cravings which gave to her countenance an expression of sombre lowering and concentrated passion, such as it was wont to exhibit in those days when her simulated deafness and

dumbness forced her to subdue all the workings of her excited soul, and compress her vermillion lips to check the ebullition of that language which on those occasions struggled to pour itself forth.

"O Italy! Italy!" she exclaimed, in an impassioned tone; "shall I ever behold thee again? Oh! my beloved native land—and thou, too, fair city, whose name is fraught with so many varied reminiscences for me,—am I doomed never to visit ye more?"

"Nisida! dearest Nisida!" said Wagner, who had returned to her unperceived and unheard—for his feet passed noiselessly over the sand; "wherefore those pas-

volcano. My thoughts wander, in spite of myself, towards Italy: I think, too, of my brother—the young and inexperienced Francisco! Moreover, there is in our mansion at Florence, a terrible mystery which prying eyes may seek to penetrate,—a closet containing a fearful secret, which, if published to the world, would heap loathing execration and disgrace on the haughty name of Riverola! And now Francisco is the sole guardian of that mystery, which he himself knows not—at least, knew not, when last we were together. But it requires a strong and an energetic mind, like my own, to watch over that awful secret. And now, Fernand—dear Fer-

"RECEIVE THE HAND OF MY WELL-BELOVED SISTER." (See p. 87.)

sionate exclamations? why this anxious longing to revisit the busy, bustling world? Are not the calm and serene delights of this island sufficient for our happiness? or art thou wearied of me, who love thee so tenderly?"

"I am not wearied of thee, my Fernand!" replied Nisida: "nor do I fail to appreciate all thy tender affection towards me. But—I can conceal it from myself and from thee no longer,—I am overcome with the monotony of this isle. Unvaried sunshine during the day—unchanging calmness by night, pall upon the soul. I crave variety—even the variety that would be afforded by a magnificent storm, or the eruption of yon sleeping

nand, thou canst not blame me—thou wilt not reproach me, if I experience an irresistible longing to return to my native land!"

"And know you not, Nisida," said Wagner, in a tone of mingled mournfulness and reproach, "that, even if there were any means for thee to return to Florence, I could not accompany thee? Dost thou not remember that I informed thee, that being doomed to death, I escaped from the power of the authorities—it matters not how; and that were I to set my foot in Florence again, it would be to return to my dungeon?"

"Alas! all this I remember well—too well!" exclaimed Nisida. "And think not, my Fernand, that I feel no



pang, when I lay bare to thee the state of my soul. But if it were possible for us to return to Italy, thou couldst dwell secretly and retiredly in some suburb of Florence; and we should be together often—very often!”

“No—Nisida,” answered Wagner, “that were impossible! Never more may I venture into that city;—and if thou couldst find even the means to revisit thy native clime, thither must thou go and there must thou dwell alone!”

For Wagner knew full well that were the lady to return to Florence, she would hear of the frightful incident which marked his trial and also the day of his escape; and, though when he had first become reunited to her on the island, he had intended, in the fulness of a generous confidence, to impart to her the terrible secret of his fate,—yet subsequent and more calm deliberation in his own mind had convinced him of the imprudence of giving her love a shock by such a tremendous—such an appalling revelation.

“Fernand,” said Nisida, breaking silence after a long pause, during which she was wrapped in profound meditation, “thy words go to my heart like fiery arrows! O my handsome—my beautiful—my beloved Fernand, why does destiny thus persecute us? It is impossible for thee to return to Florence:—it is equally impossible for me to renounce the first opportunity which heaven may afford for me to repair thither! My God! wherefore do our fates tend in such opposite directions? To separate from thee, were maddening—maddening: to abandon my brother Francisco—to desert the grave and solemn interests which demand my presence at home, were to render myself perjured to a vow which I breathed, and which heaven witnessed, when I knelt long years ago at the death-bed of my mother!”

“After all thou hast said, my beloved Nisida,” exclaimed Fernand, in a voice expressive of the deepest melancholy, “I should be wrong—I should be even criminal to listen only to the whisperings of my own selfishness and retain thee here, did opportunity serve for thy departure. But on this island shall I remain—perhaps for ever! And if the time should ever come when you grew wearied of that bustling world across the sea, and thy memory travelled to this lonely isle where thy Fernand was left behind thee,—haply thou wouldst embark to return hither and pass the remainder of thy days with one who can never cease to love thee!”

Tears came into the eyes of Nisida—of her who so seldom, so very seldom wept;—and throwing herself into Wagner’s arms, she exclaimed, “God grant that I may revisit my native land; and believe me—oh! believe me when I declare that I would come back to thee the moment the interests of my brother no longer demanded my presence!”

They embraced fondly; and then sat down upon the sand to partake of their morning repast.

But the thoughts of both were naturally intent upon the recent topic of their discourse; and their conversation, though each determined to force it into other channels, reverted to the subject which was now uppermost in their minds.

“What must my poor brother Francisco conjecture to be the cause of my prolonged, and to him mysterious absence?” said Nisida, as her eyes were cast wistfully over the wide expanse of waters.—“Methinks that I have already hinted to thee how the foolish passion which he had conceived for a maiden of low degree and obscure birth, compelled me—in accordance with his nearest and best interests—to consign the object of his boyish love to the Convent of the Carmelites! Yes—and it was with surprise and dismay indescribable that I heard, ere I was torn away from Florence by the villain Stephano, how that convent was sacked and destroyed by unknown marauders—”

“Full intelligence of which terrible sacrilege you communicated to me by signs the second and last time you visited me in my dungeon,” observed Wagner.

“And I heard also, and with increased fear,” continued Nisida, “that some of the inmates of that convent had escaped; and, being unable, in consequence of my simulated deafness and dumbness, to set on foot the necessary inquiries, I could not learn whether Flora Francatelli was amongst those who had so escaped the almost general ruin. Oh! if she should have survived that fatal night—and if she should have again encountered my brother! Alas! thou perceivest, my Fernand, how necessary it is for me to quit this island on the first occasion which may serve for that purpose.”

“And wouldst thou, Nisida,” asked Wagner, reproach-

fully, “place thyself as a barrier between the Count of Riverola and her whom he loves?”

“Yes!” ejaculated Nisida, her countenance suddenly assuming a stern and imperious expression: “for the most important interests are involved in the marriage which he may contract. But enough of this, Fernand,” she added, relapsing into a more tender mood. “And now tell me—canst thou blame me for the longing desire which has seized upon me—the ardent craving to return to Florence?”

“Nay—I do not blame thee, dearest Nisida!” he exclaimed: “but I pity thee—I feel for thee! Because,” he continued, “if I understand rightly, though wilt be compelled to feign deafness and dumbness once more, in order to work out thy mysterious aims;—thou wilt be compelled to submit to that awful martyrdom—that terrible privation—that tremendous duplicity, which thou wilt find so doubly painful and so difficult to resume after the full enjoyment and exercise of the blessed faculties of speech and hearing.”

“Alas! such will be my destiny!” murmured Nisida: “and, oh! that destiny is a sad one! But,” she exclaimed, after a moment’s pause, and as a reminiscence appeared suddenly to strike her, “dost thou not think that even such a destiny as that becomes tolerable, when it is fulfilled as the only means of carrying out the conditions of a vow breathed to a well-beloved and dying mother? But wearisome—oh! crushingly tedious was that mode of existence!—and the first bright day of real happiness which I enjoyed, was that when I first knew that thou didst love me! And again, Fernand—oh! again was I supremely happy when one evening—thou mayst remember well—it was the eve when my brother and the minion Flora exchanged tender words together in the room adjoining where we were seated—on that evening, Fernand, I bethought by signs that thou wouldst breathe the words, ‘I love thee!’ and thou didst so—and I drank in those words as a person dying with thirst would imbibe the first drop of pure spring water which was placed to his lips!”

Fernand pressed Nisida to his heart;—for he saw, in spite of her anxiety to return to Italy, that she really loved him.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### NISIDA AND THE DEMON.

BUT though sensual and impassioned feelings led the beauteous Nisida thus frequently to melt into softness and tenderness when she contemplated the wondrously handsome countenance of Fernand Wagner,—yet from this day forth her longings to return to Italy became more earnest—more irresistible; and she would compel him to sit by her side for hours together on the shore, while she eagerly watched for the appearance of a sail in the horizon.

And Fernand, who divined her object, and knew full well wherefore those fine and eloquent black eyes were cast so wistfully over the sunny expanse, Fernand himself now longed for the advent of a ship,—so sincere was his love for Nisida, that he was prepared to make any sacrifice—aye, even to suffer her to depart and leave him alone on the island—in order to promote her happiness.

Thus passed away the sixth month; and on the afternoon of the last day thereof, when Wagner was about to observe to her that the time had now arrived for him to cross the mountains once again, she said of her own accord, “Fernand, my beloved, when next you visit the other side of the island, you would do well to raise some sign, or leave some permanent mark to show that there are inhabitants on this land. For a ship might touch in that point—the sailors might seek the shore for water—and they would then search to discover the spot where those who raised the signal-post are dwelling.”

“Your wish shall be fulfilled, dearest,” answered Wagner; “and without delay will I seek the other side of the island.”

Then they embraced tenderly; and Fernand departed once more to fulfil his frightful doom!

Nisida watched his receding form until it was lost in the groves intervening between the plains and the acclivities of the range of mountains; and then she seated herself again on the sand, wondering of what nature her husband’s secret could be, and why it compelled him to absent himself occasionally from her.

Though he kept an accurate calculation of the lapse of time, and counted the passing days with unvarying precision,—yet she retained no such faithful calendar in her

memory; and thus it had not yet struck her that his absence always occurred on the last day of the month.

The hour of sunset was now rapidly approaching; and as Nisida was wrapped up in thought, but with her eyes fixed wistfully upon the mighty bosom of the deep, a slight sound as of the rustling of garments fell upon her ears.

She started up, and glanced rapidly around.

But how ineffable was her astonishment—how great was her sudden joy—when she beheld the figure of a man approaching her;—for it instantly struck her that the same ship which had conveyed him thither, might bear her away from a scene which had latterly become insupportably monotonous.

The individual whose presence thus excited her astonishment and her delight, was tall, thin, and attired rather in the German, than in the Italian fashion: but as he drew nearer, Nisida experienced undefinable emotions of alarm, and vague fears rushed to her soul—for the expression of that being's countenance was such as to inspire no pleasurable emotions.

It was not that he was ugly, —no—his features were well formed, and his eyes were of dazzling brilliancy. But their glances were penetrating and reptile-like,—glances beneath which those of ordinary mortals would have quailed; and his countenance was stamped with a mingled sardonism and melancholy which rendered it painful to contemplate.

Nisida attributed her feeling of uneasiness and embarrassment to the shame which she experienced in finding herself half naked in the presence of a stranger; for so oppressive had become the heat of summer that her clothing was most scanty, and she had long ceased to decorate her person with garlands and wreaths of fantastically woven flowers.

"Fear not, lady," said the Demon—for he indeed it was:—"I am come to counsel and solace—not to alarm thee."

"How knowest thou that I require counsel? and who art thou that talkest to me of solace?" asked Nisida, her sentiment of shame yielding to one of boundless surprise at hearing herself thus addressed by a being who appeared to read the inmost secrets of her soul.

"I am one who can penetrate into all the mysteries of the human heart," returned the fiend, in his sonorous, deep-toned voice; "and I can gather thine history from the expression of thy countenance—the attitude in which I first beheld thee, whilst thou wast still seated upon the strand—and the mingled emotions of surprise and joy with which thou didst mark my presence. Is it then, difficult to imagine that thou requirest counsel to teach thee how to proceed so as to obtain thine emancipation from this isle? or wouldst be extraordinary if, moved by thy sorrow, I offered to befriend thee? And is it not ever the way with mortals—poor weak, miserable beings that they are—to grow speedily dissatisfied with their lot? In the spirit of religion ye say that heaven controls your destinies according to its own wise purposes;—and when all goes well with ye, and you have your desires, ye pray and are thankful—because forsooth," added the Demon, with a smile of bitter scorn, "it is so easy to pray when ye are contented and happy, and so easy to be thankful when ye are pampered with all ye require. Here art thou, lady,—on an island teeming with the choicest fruits of the earth, and enjoying an eternal summer,—where all is pleasant to the view, and to whose silent shores the cares of the great world cannot come; and yet thou wouldst quit this calm retreat, and rush back into the vortex of evil passions—warring interests—conflicting pursuits! But I will not weary thee with my reflections;—although it is my nature first to taunt and upbraid those whom I intend to serve!"

"And who are thou, strange being, that reasonest morally with the smile of scorn upon thy lips?" demanded Nisida, the vague alarms which had previously influenced her reviving with additional power: "who art thou, I say, that comest to reproach, and yet profferest thine aid?"

"No matter who I am," replied the fiend. "Some day thou mayst know me better if thou wilt—"

"But how camest thou hither? Where is the ship that brought thee—the boat that landed thee?" demanded Nisida, in a tone of feverish impatience.

"No ship brought me hither—no boat set me on the shore," answered the Demon, fixing his eyes—those piercing eyes upon Nisida's countenance, as if to read the impression which this strange revelation made upon her secret soul.

"Then who art thou?" exclaimed the lady, a cold shudder passing over her entire frame, although she retreated not, nor withdrew the glances which she through her wondrous state of mind, was enabled to retain fixed upon the Demon's countenance.

"Seek not to learn as yet whom I am," said the fiend. "Let it suffice for thee to know that I am something more than a mere mortal—a being gifted with powers which, in the hands of such an one as thou, would throw the entire world into convulsions; for there is much in thee after my own heart, beautiful Nisida of Riverola."

"Ah! thou art acquainted even with my name!" cried Nisida, again shuddering violently in spite of her powerful efforts to appear calm and fearless.

"I am acquainted with thy name, and with all that concerns thee and thine, Nisida," replied the fiend; "aye," he added, with a malignant chuckle,—even to the mystery of the closet in thy late father's chamber, and the contents of the terrible manuscript which taught thee such dreadful secrets! I know, too, all that thou hast done to serve thine aims—thy simulated deafness and dumbness—the assassination of Agnes—the imprisonment of Flora in the convent—"

"Then art thou indeed some superhuman power," interrupted Nisida in a tone of inexpressible alarm; "and I dare hold no further converse with thee!"

"One moment—and thou wilt think differently!" exclaimed the Demon. "But I will give thee an evidence of my power. Here, take this instrument,—'tis called a telescope—and use it for a single minute.—Glance across the waters, and thou shalt behold a scene which will interest thee somewhat, I trow!"

The fiend handed her a telescope, and directed her to apply it to her eye. She obeyed him, though reluctantly; but intense curiosity overcame her scruples—and, moreover, her extraordinary strength of mind aided her in supporting the presence of one whom she knew to be invested with superhuman powers—but of what nature she feared to guess.

Nisida turned towards the sea, and used the magic telescope as directed, while the Demon stood behind her, his countenance expressing a diabolical triumph mingled with blighting scorn.

But, ah! what does Nisida behold?

The moment she applies the telescope to her eyes, she is transported, as it were to her own native city. She is in Florence—yes, in the fair capital of Tuscany. Every familiar scene is present to her again; and she once more views the busy crowds and the bustling haunts of men. She sweeps them all with a hurried glance; and then her looks settle upon a young couple, walking together in a secluded place on the banks of the Arno. But, oh; how terribly flash her eyes—how changed with wrath and concentrated rage suddenly becomes her countenance! For in that fond pair, wandering so lovingly together on the Arno's margin, she recognises her brother Francisco and the maiden Flora Francatelli!

"Thou hast seen enough!" cried the Demon, snatching the telescope from her hands. "And now, more than ever," he added, with a malignant smile of triumph, "dost thou long to revisit thy native land. It was to confirm that longing that I showed thee the scene!"

"And canst thou give me the means to return thither?" demanded Nisida, almost maddened by the spectacle that had met her eyes.

"Listen!" exclaimed the fiend; "and hear me patiently. I charge thee not to breathe to thy Fernando one word descriptive of this interview which thou hast had with me. Thou couldst simulate dumbness for ten long years or more, with a success which renders thee great and glorious in my eyes—for I love the hypocrite and the deceiver," he added, with one of his diabolical smiles, "although I myself deceive them! Be dumb, then; in all that relates to my visit here. But thou mayst so beset thy Fernando with earnest entreaties to give thee the means of departure from the island,—for he can do so, if he have the will,—that he shall be unable to resist thy prayers—thy tears—thine anguish, real or feigned, whichever that anguish may be! And should he not yield to thine impressions, then assail him on another point. Tell him that thou wilt never rest until thou shalt have discovered the cause of those periodical visits which he makes to the other side of yon mountains—threaten to accompany him the next time he goes thither! But I need not teach thee how to be energetic nor eloquent: I need not suggest the measures nor the language to be used in the furtherance of thine aims. For thou art a woman of iron mind and of persuasive tongue; and thy perseverance, as thy will, is indomitable.

Follow my counsel, then—and, though the future to a great extent be concealed from my view, yet I dare prophesy success for thee! And now farewell, Nisida—farewell!”

And the Demon retreated rapidly towards the forests, as if to seek the abode of those terrible serpents whose cunning was akin to his own.

Nisida was too much astonished by the nature of the counsel which his deep sonorous voice had wafted to her ear to be able to utter a word until his rooding form was no longer visible; and then she exclaimed wildly, “I have assuredly seen Satan face to face!”

And her blood ran cold in her veins.

But a few moments were sufficient to enable that woman of wondrous energy to recover her presence of mind and collect her scattered thoughts; and she sat down on the sand to ponder upon the strange incident which had so terribly varied the monotony of her existence.

She thought too of the scene which she had beheld on the banks of the Arno—her worst fears were confirmed; Flora had escaped from the ruin of the Carmelite Convent—was alive, was at liberty—and was with Francisco!

Oh! how she now longed for the return of Fernand Wagner—but many hours must elapse—a night must pass—and the orb of day which had by this time gone down must gain the meridian once more ere he would come back.

And in the meantime—although she suspected it not—he must fulfil the awful doom of a Wehr-Wolf, as the reader will find by the perusal of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER LVII.

### THE WEHR-WOLF.

It was within a few minutes of sunset as Fernand Wagner, having crossed the mountains, hastened down that bituminous declivity constituting the scene of desolation which separated the range of volcanic hills from the delightful plains and verdant groves stretching to the sea-shore.

A shudder passed over his frame as he beheld the solitary tree in which he had seen the monstrous snake playing and gambolling on the morning when he was thrown upon this Mediterranean isle.

“Oh!” he exclaimed aloud, as he sped onwards, “what happiness and also what misery have I known in this clime! But—doomed and fated being that I am—such is my destiny—and so must it be, here or elsewhere—in whichever land I may visit—in whatever part of the earth I may abide! Oh! merciful heaven, can no prayer—no self-mortification remove the ban—the curse from my devoted head?”

He suddenly stood still—threw a horrified glance towards the west—and then fell upon his knees with a fearful yell of agony, as he saw the last beams of the sun flickering in that quadrature.

“Oh! just heaven,” he exclaimed, stretching forth his arms towards the sky, and with ineffable anguish depicted on his up-turned countenance; “spare me—spare me! Have I not been punished enough? Oh! take away from me this appalling doom—let me become old, wrinkled, forlorn, and poor once more—let me return to my humble cot in the Black Forest,—or let me die, Almighty power! if thou wilt,—but spare me—spare me now! Wretch—wretch that I was to be dashed by thy specious promises, O Faust! But I am justly punished—thy vengeance, O heaven! is well deserved—sinner, sinner that I am!”

And, as he uttered these words in a tone of bitter lamentation, and while his handsome face grew horrible with the dread workings that distorted it, some unseen but irresistible influence hurled him prostrate on the green sward; and yet again he shrieked, as the moment of an agonising transformation was at hand, “Spare me, great heaven! though thy vengeance be most just.”

Those were the last human sounds he uttered for several hours—for, scarcely had they escaped his lips, when the horrible change began—and in a few moments a wild yell rent the air, and a monstrous wolf sprang from the spot where Wagner had fallen down in such agonising writhings.

Away went the ferocious animal, headlong towards the sea, careering, thundering on, as if intent on plunging into the silent depths, and there ending its dreadful course in a watery grave.

But, no—death yawns not for the Wehr-Wolf! Scarcely have its feet touched the verge of the water,

when the monster wheels round, and continues its whirlwind way without for an instant relaxing one tittle of its speed.

Away—away, through the fruit-bearing groves,—clearing for itself a path of ruin and havoc—scattering the gems of the trees, and breaking down the richly-laden vines—away, away flies the monster, hideous howls bursting from its foaming mouth.

The birds scream and whistle wildly, as, startled from their usually tranquil retreats, they spread their gay and gaudy plumage, and go with gushing sound through the evening air.

Madly—furiously over nature’s carpeting of flowers—rapidly—headlong through the groups of verdant evergreens and the thickets of fragrant shrubs—spurning the rich herbage and tracing a path of woful destruction,—speeds on the howling animal.

He reaches the banks of a stream, and bounds along its pleasant margin—trampling to death noble swans which vainly seek to evade the fury of the rushing monster.

Away—away towards the forests hurries the Wehr-Wolf—impelled, lashed on by an invisible scourge, and filling the woods with its appalling yells,—while its mouth scatters foam like thick flakes of snow.

Hark! there is an ominous rustling in one of the trees of the forest; and the monster seems instinctively to know the danger which menaces it. But still its course is not changed!—it seems not to exercise its own will in shaping its course; it obeys an influence unseen—not understood—though fatally irresistible,—and its howlings now grow more frightful—more horrible than ever.

Down the tremendous snake flings itself from the tree—and in an instant its hideous coils are wound round the foaming, steaming, palpitating body of the wolf. The air is rent with the yell of agony that bursts from the throat of the horrified monster, as it tumbles over and over, as if it had run to the length of a tether—for the snake clings with its tail to the bough from which it has darted down.

But the yielding of the wolf is only momentary: up—up it springs again—and away, away it careers,—more madly—more desperately—more ferociously, if possible, than before.

And the snake? Oh! poor, weak, and powerless was even that dread reptile of forty feet in length when combating with a monster lashed on and also protected by invisible fiends. For, as the wolf sped on again, the boa was dragged as if by a thousand horses from its coiling hold upon the bough,—and shaken, lacerated, and afflicted, the hideous reptile unwound itself from the ferocious animal, and fell powerless on the grass, where the vermin of the forest attacked it with their greedy maws ere its pestilential breath had ceased.

Away—away towards the mountains rushes the Wehr-Wolf, those mountains which constitute the barrier of safety to protect Nisida from the fangs of the animal that would mangle her fair form were she to cross its path.

Yes—even she would be sacrificed to the indomitable and irresponsible rage of the monster, obedient only to the unseen scourge and the invisible influence that hurries him on.

But, ah! he rushes up the acclivity—he clears rugged rock and jutting crag with wondrous bounds:—just heaven! will he pass those heights?—will he cross the range of volcanic hills?

Oh! Nisida, who art on the other side of that range,—little dreamest thou of the peril that menaces thee!

Joy! joy! the danger has passed,—the wolf turns aside from a loftier impediment of crag than had yet appeared in its course; and down—down again towards the groves and valleys—over the bituminous waste made by the volcano—on, on goes the monster.

Away—away, through the verdant scenes once more,—fresh havoc—fresh desolation—fresh ruin marking his maddened course,—away—away the Wehr-Wolf speeds.

The moon rises to give a stronger and purer light to the dreadful spectacle—a light stronger and purer than that of the night itself, which is never completely dark in the tropics.

Away—away—and still on, on—outstripping time—running a race with the fleeting moments, full hours and hours of unrelaxing speed are numbered—thus goes the wolf.

And now he snuffs the morning air; the fresh breeze from the east raises the foam of the Mediterranean waves, and allays the heat of that on the body of the careering—bounding—and almost flying monster.

His howling grows less ferocious—his yells become less terrible; and now his pace is a trifle more measured—that relaxation of a whirlwind speed gradually increasing.

‘Tis done: the course is over—the race is run;—and the Wehr-Wolf falls in writhing agonies upon the fresh grass, whence in a few moments rises Fernand Wagner—a man once more!

But as he throws a glance of horror around on the scene of his night’s dread employment, he starts back with mingled aversion and alarm;—for there—with folded arms, eyes terrible to gaze upon, and a counte-

all the sobs and sighs that tell of human agony,—then multiply the aggregate by ten million, million times its sum,—and go on multiplying by millions and millions till thou wast tired of counting,—thou wouldst not form even an idea of that huge amount of human misery which could alone appease me! For on man do I visit the hate wherewith my own fall has animated me;—powerless on high,—where once I was so powerful,—I make my kingdom of earth and of hell—and in both my influence is great and is terrible!”

“Yes—yes: too great—too terrible!” exclaimed Wagner. “But why dost thou persecute me with thy

“AGAIN THE SCREAM BURSTS FROM THE VICTIM’S LIPS.” (See p. 94.)

nance expressing infernal triumph and bitter scorn—stood the Demon,

“Fiend! what wouldst thou with me?” demanded Wagner. “Are not the sufferings which I have just endured enough to satisfy the hatred of all human beings? are not the horrors of the past night sufficient to glut even thine insatiate heart?”

“Mortal!” said the Demon, speaking in his profound and awe-inspiring tones,—“didst thou take all the miseries which at this moment afflict thy race,—combine all the bitter woes and crushing sorrows that madden the brains of men,—mix up all the tears and collect

presence? I did not call thee—I did not invoke thine aid.”

“No—but thou requirest it!” said the Demon, with a satirical smile. “Thinkest thou to be enabled to dream away thine existence in this island, with thy warm, impassioned Nisida? No, mortal, no! Already does she pine for her own native Italian clime; and she will end by loathing thee and this land if she continue to dwell here, and with only thee as her companion. But it is in thy power to make Nisida forget Italy—Francisco—Flora—and all the grave interests and dreadful mysteries which seem to demand her presence in the busy world;—it is in thy power to render her happy and con-

tented in this island—to attach her to thee for the remainder of thine existence—to provide her with the means of preserving her youth and her beauty unimpaired, even as thine own—to crush for ever all those pinings and longings which now carry her glances and her thoughts wistfully across the sea,—in a word, to bend her mind to all thy wishes—her soul to all thy purposes! Yes—it is in thy power to do all this—and the same decision which shall place that amount of ineffable happiness within thy reach will also redeem thee from the horrible destiny of a Wehr-Wolf—leaving thee thy youth and thy beauty, and investing thee with a power equal to that enjoyed by thy late master, Faust.

“And doubtless on the same conditions?” said Wagner, half ironically, and half in horror at the mere idea of surrendering his soul to Satan.

“Art thou blind to the means of promoting thine earthly happiness?” demanded the Demon, fixing on Fernand a glance intended to appal and to intimidate, but at which he on whom it was bent quailed not. “Hast thou not received sufficient experience of the terrific sufferings which twelve times a year thou art doomed to endure? Knowest thou not on each occasion thou destroyest human life, where mortal beings are in thy path—or that thou ravagest the fair scenes which He whose name I dare not mention has created? and art thou ignorant of the tremendous horror and loathsome obloquy which attach themselves to the name of a Wehr-Wolf? See—thou art already wearied of travelling through the various climes of the earth; thou no longer delightest in cultivating thine intellect, so marvelously adapted to receive knowledge of all kinds;—and thy power to create whole mines of wealth is exercised no more. But thou wouldst fix thine abode in this island for ever—were Nisida to remain thy companion! Well—and if thou lovest her? for assuredly a vessel will some day touch on these shores. What wouldst thou do, then? All lonely—desolate—forlorn, thou wouldst curse the day that gave thee regenerated life—thou wouldst seek death—and to thee death may not come yet for many, many years! Fernand, thou art worse than mad not to embrace my offers. Consent to become mine—mine eternally, when thy mortal breath shall have left thy body,—and in the meantime I promise thee power illimitable—happiness such as no human being ever yet enjoyed—”

“No—no!” exclaimed Wagner, his better feelings rising dominant from the awful struggle that took place in his breast while the fiend thus spoke: “no—no! Rather the destiny of the Wehr-Wolf—rather lose my Nisida for ever—rather the solitude of this island for the remainder of my days—than resign all chance of salvation! And that mine immortal soul is as yet safe, the very temptations thou offerest with such eloquent persuasion fully proves! Oh! heaven, in its infinite mercy, will receive the dreadful sufferings thine mine to endure each month, as an atonement for that hour of weakness—madness—folly, when dazzled by the words of Faust, and overwhelmed by a weight of miseries, I accepted a regenerated existence. Yes—heaven will forgive me yet; and, therefore, avaunt—fiend!—avaunt! avaunt!”

And, as he uttered these words in an excited and impassioned manner, he made the sign of the cross, and the Demon fled howling into the adjacent wood, his form rapidly losing its mortal shape and assuming an appearance too horrible to describe.

Wagner turned aside in dismay, and sank upon the ground, as if blasted by the lightnings that marked with their forked and vivid flashes the transformation of the Prince of Darkness.

A deep sleep fell on Fernand's eyes; and in his dreams he thought that he heard a solemn but rejoicing strain of music filling the air—the harmony of the spheres! And that divine melody seemed to speak a language eloquent and intelligible, and to give him hope and promise of a deliverance from the dreadful destiny which his weakness and his folly had entailed upon him. Then a luminous mist appeared to collect around him—enveloping him in its glorious halo. The music grew fainter and fainter; and at the moment when it died away altogether, a heavenly and radiant being rose in the midst of the lustrous cloud—an angel, clad in white and shining garments, and with snowy wings closed and drooping gracefully from his shoulders. Looking benignly upon the sleeping Wagner, the angel said in a soft and liquid tone, “Thrice hast thou resisted the temptations of the enemy of mankind: once in thy dungeon at Florence—a second time amidst the defiles of

yon mountains—and now on this spot. He will appear to thee no more, unless thou thyself shalt summon him. Much hast thou already done in atonement for the crime that endangered thy soul when, withdrawing thy faith from heaven, thou didst accept new life on the conditions proposed to thee by the agent of Satan:—but much more must thou yet do, ere the atonement will be complete!” The form ceased to speak, and gradually became fainter and fainter, until it disappeared with its glorious halo altogether.

Then Fernand awoke—and his dream was vividly impressed upon his memory.

Assuming a kneeling posture, he clasped his hands fervently together, and said aloud, “Merciful heaven! be the vision one divinely sent—or be it but the sport of an imagination fevered by a long night of suffering—I receive it as an emblem, and as a sign of hope and promise.”

He arose:—the sun was now high in the heavens; and he hastened to the shore to perform his ablutions.

Refreshed in body with the bath which he took in the Mediterranean, and in mind with the influence of the vision, he retraced his way towards the mountains.

The range was passed in safety; and he once more set foot on that section of the island where Nisida was so anxiously awaiting his presence.

## CHAPTER LVIII.

### THE EFFECTS OF THE DEMON'S COUNSEL.

THE hour at which Fernand Wagner was accustomed to return after his periodical excursions beyond the mountains had long passed;—for it will be remembered that he had fallen asleep and slumbered some time after his restoration to human shape and his encounter with the Demon.

Nisida was already a prey to the wildest alarms, which were not altogether untainted with selfishness; for the enemy of mankind had led her to believe that Wagner had within his reach certain means of enabling her to quit the island;—and she trembled lest death might have intervened to snatch him away, and thus annihilate the hopes which had been so insidiously infused into her soul.

It is but, however, just to observe that she was also distressed at his prolonged absence on grounds more creditable to her heart; for she shuddered convulsively as the idea—the appalling idea flashed to her mind, that her handsome Fernand might at that moment be writhing in the coils of a horrible snake.

Then, arousing herself with that courage and iron resolution which constituted such essential features in her character, Nisida resolved to attempt the passage of the mountains, and seek for her lover; and at the time when this thought was uppermost in her mind, she vowed to rescue him, if possible—and if not, to die with him.

But as she drew near the rising ground leading towards the craggy mountains, she suddenly beheld the object of her anxiety approaching her; and in a few minutes they were locked in each other's arms.

“My Fernand,” said Nisida at length, “I feared that some danger had befallen you, and I was hastening to join you on the other side of these heights, either to aid you in escaping from the peril, or to share its consequences with you.”

“Beloved Nisida!” exclaimed Wagner, casting his arm around her waist, and conducting her back to the immediate vicinity of their rudely constructed cottage; “how welcome to me is this proof of thy regard—this earnest of thy love!”

“I can never cease to love you, dear Fernand,” answered Nisida, turning her fine large eyes upon his handsome face, while the flush of ardent passion animated her own splendid countenance: then, while her bosom heaved with a profound sigh, she added, “Oh! that I should seek to quit thee, Fernand! The thought smites to the inmost recesses of my heart. And yet it is to some extent thy fault—for wherefore wilt thou not accompany me?”

“In the first place, beloved one,” replied Wagner, “thou talkest as if a ship were already in sight, or a boat lay ready to launch from this shore: secondly, I have before assured thee that I dare not return to Florence, and that as I therefore cannot be thy companion thither, it would be better for me to remain on this island—to which, perhaps,” he added in a mournful tone, “you might, after all, never come back!”

"Oh! Fernand, think not so ill of your Nisida!" she cried, throwing one of her snowy full arms round his neck, and looking earnestly, but yet tenderly on his countenance. "Never—never shall I know happiness again until I have revisited Florence. Each day that passes without giving me a hope to see this aim fulfilled, increases my misery—adds to my uneasiness—argments my anxiety—so that in a short time my suspense will become intolerable. It is nearly so already, Fernand; and I sometimes feel that even thy sweet caresses and kindness cannot soothe me. Oh! blame me not, Fernand—but pity me:—yes—and help me, if you can!"

"Dearest Nisida, willingly would I sacrifice my own inclinations to forward thine," exclaimed Wagner, in a tone of deep sincerity; "but how is it possible that I can aid thee? I have not wings to affix to thy fair shoulders—I have not a voice powerful enough to raise echoes on a shore whence assistance might be sent. Nay, look not sternly on me, beloved Nisida. I did not intend to vex thee with idle jestings;—but thou knowest that I cannot aid thee!"

"Fernand, you love me not!" exclaimed Nisida, suddenly withdrawing her arm from its fond position about his neck, and retreating a few paces. "No:—you do not love me as you were wont—or as I love you. You, doubtless, have some means of gratifying my ardent longings. A secret voice whispers me that if you choose to exert all your powers, you might render me happy—at least so happy as I could be when separated from you! I have assured you that naught save the most important interests would render me thus anxious to return to my native city;—and if you find me this importunate, you should pity me—not refuse to aid me."

"Holy Virgin! this is maddening!" cried Wagner. "Nisida—be reasonable; how can I assist thee?—how can I enable thee to cross that sea which appears to us boundless? And thou accusest me of not loving thee, Nisida! Oh! this is too cruel!"

"No—it is thou who art cruel!" exclaimed Nisida, in an impassioned tone. "I know that you are not a being of an ordinary stamp—that your intellect is as wonderful as your person is god-like—and that you possess a mine of knowledge in the extent of which no mortal can equal thee. Is it strange—is it marvellous, then, that I should implore thee to exert thy powers—the vast powers of thy glorious intelligence, to forward my designs? Nay—seek not to interrupt me, Fernand; denial is vain! A secret voice continues to whisper within me that thou art able to do all I ask: I know not the means to be used—I seek not to know them; but that thou hast such means within thy reach, is a conviction firmly impressed upon my mind. Here, then, Fernand—at thy feet—on my knees, do I implore thee—beseech thee, not to refuse the boon which I—thy loving wife—crave at the hands of thee—my husband—as if I were a humble suppliant suing at the footstool of a throned king!"

"Nisida—Nisida!" cried Fernand, painfully excited by this sudden movement on her part, and endeavouring to raise her: "what means so strange a proceeding? Rise, dearest—rise: it is not to me that you must thus humble yourself!"

"No—I will not quit this suppliant attitude until you shall have granted my request—my prayer," said Nisida. "Refuse me not—my Fernand—oh! I implore you not to refuse me! Whatever means be within your reach, exert them on my behalf. A brother's interests—the remembrance of a solemn vow breathed to my lamented and much wronged mother—and the safeguard of a mystery, the discovery of which by curious and prying eyes would heap infamy and disgrace on the name of Riverola—all these reasons render me thus anxious to return to Italy. And if you keep me here, Fernand, I shall pine away—I shall perish before your eyes—and you will repent of my harshness when it is too late. Or else," she added, speaking with wild rapidity, "I shall be reduced to despair, and in a moment of excitement, shall seek death in those silent waters, or climb your craggy mountains to fling myself headlong from their summit."

"Nisida, your menaces are maddening as your supplications to me are vain and useless!" said Wagner, himself now labouring under "a fearful excitement. "Rise, I implore you—rise, and let us endeavour to converse more calmly—more rationally."

"Yes—I will rise," said Nisida, now affecting a sullen haughtiness, and preparing to wield another of the weapons which the Demon had placed in her hand: "I rise, Fernand, because I feel that I was wrong thus to abuse myself—I, who bear the proud name of Riverola;—and she tossed her head indignantly. "Well—it seems

that you are resolved to keep me chained to your side on this island. Be it so; but henceforth let there be no mistrust—no mystery—no secrets between us. If Italy must be forgotten for ever, then this isle shall become our world, and our thoughts shall travel not beyond its confines. All shall be mutual confidence—a reciprocal outpouring of our minutest thoughts. On that condition only will existence *here* be tolerable to us both. And now as a proof that thou wilt assent to this proposal—than which nothing can be more rational—let our new life of mutual confidence date from this moment. Tell me then, my Fernand," she proceeded, assuming a winning manner, and throwing as much pathos as possible into her sweetly musical voice—that voice which gave new and indescribable charms to the soft Italian language—"tell me then, my Fernand, wherefore thou quittest me at certain intervals—why thou invariably seekest on those occasions the opposite side of the island—and whether thou wilt in future suffer me to be the companion of those journeys?"

"Thou be my companion!—thou, Nisida!" exclaimed Wagner, his whole frame convulsed with mental agony. "Merciful heaven! what fiend hath prompted thee thus to speak? Nisida," he said, suddenly exercising a strong mastery over his emotions, as he seized her hand and pressed it with spasmodic violence—"Nisida, as thou valuest our happiness, seek not to penetrate into my secret—proffer not that mad request again!"

And, dropping her hand, he paced the shore with the agitation of reviving excitement.

"Fernand," said Nisida, approaching him, and once more speaking in a resolute and even severe tone—"listen to me! When we met upon this island, an accident of a terrible nature led me to forget my vow of self-imposed dumbness; and when the excitement occasioned by that accident had somewhat passed, you were in doubt whether you had really heard my voice or had been deluded by a fevered imagination. It would then have been easy for me to simulate dumbness again; and you would have believed that the bewilderment of the dread scene had misled you. But I chose not to maintain a secret from thee—and I confessed that my long supposed loss of two glorious faculties was a mere deed of duplicity on my part. At that time you said that you also had explanations to give—and yet months and months have passed by, and confidence has not begotten confidence. Let this mistrust on your part cease. Reveal to me the cause of those frequent excursions across the mountains; or else, the next time that you set out on one of the mysterious journeys, I shall assuredly become your companion."

"Now, Nisida," exclaimed Wagner, his heart rent with indescribable tortures,—"it is you who are cruel—you who are unjust!"

"No, Fernand—it is you!" cried Nisida, in a thrilling, penetrating tone, as if of anguish.

"Merciful heavens! what misery is in store for us both!" said Wagner, pressing his hand to his burning brow. "Oh! that some ship would appear to bear thee away—or that my destiny were other than it is!"

And he flung himself upon the sand in a fit of black despair.

Nisida now trembled at the violence of those emotions which she had raised in the breast of him whom she loved; and for a minute she reproached herself for having so implicitly obeyed the counsel of the evil spirit.

Her own feelings were worked up to that pitch of excitement, which with woman—even in the strongest-minded—must have its vent in tears;—and she burst into an agony of weeping.

The sound of those sobs was more than the generous-hearted and affectionate Fernand could bear; and starting from the sand whereon he had flung himself, he exclaimed, "Nisida—my beloved Nisida, dry those tears—subdue this frantic grief! Let us say no more upon these exciting topics this evening; but I will meditate—I will reflect until the morrow,—and then I will communicate to thee the result of my deliberations."

"Oh! there is then hope for me yet!" cried Nisida joyfully; "and thou hast the means to grant my wishes—but thou fearest to use them. We will say no more this evening on subjects calculated to give us so little pleasure;—but to-morrow, my Fernand—to-morrow—"

And Nisida stopped her own utterance by pressing her lips to those of Wagner, winding her beautiful arms most lovingly round his neck at the same time, and pressing him to her bosom.

But that night and the ensuing morn were destined to wring the heart-strings of the unhappy Fernand; for the



influence of the Demon—though unknown and unrecognised—was dominant with Nisida.

## CHAPTER LIX

### MUTUAL CONFESSIONS.

It was night—and Fernand was pacing the sand with even greater agitation than he had manifested during the cruel scene of the evening.

He was alone on the sea-shore; and Nisida slept in the hut.

Terrible thoughts warred in the breast of Wagner. Nisida's language had astonished and alarmed him; and he was convinced that Satan himself had inspired her with those ideas, the utterance of which had nearly goaded him to madness.

She had insisted on the belief that he was acquainted with the means of enabling her to return to Italy;—and yet Nisida was not a mere girl—a silly, whimsical being, who would assert the wildest physical impossibilities just as caprice might prompt her. No;—she really entertained that belief—but without having any ostensible ground to establish it.

"Such an impression could only have been made upon her mind by the fiend who seeks to entangle me in his meshes!" murmured Wagner to himself, as he paced the strand. "The Demon has failed to tempt me as yet—thrice has he failed;—and now he musters all his force to assail me,—to assail me, too, in the most vulnerable points! But, O heaven! give me strength to resist the dread influence thus brought to bear upon me! What course can I adopt? what plan pursue? If to-morrow must witness the renewal of that scene which occurred this evening, I shall succumb—I shall yield: in a moment of despair I shall exclaim, 'Yes, Nisida—I will sacrifice everything to acquire the power to transport thee back to Italy;—and I shall hurry to you mountains, and seeking their wildest defile, shall evoke the Enemy of Mankind, and say, 'Come, Satan! I give thee my soul in exchange for the limitless power thou offerest.'—And this will be the terrible result—the fearful catastrophe!"

Big drops of agony stood upon Fernand's brow as he uttered these words. He saw that he was hovering on the verge of a fearful abyss—and he trembled lest he should fall, so intense was his love for Nisida.

At one moment he thought of the soothing vision, full of hope and promise, which had occupied his slumber in the morning; at another he pondered on the tears, the prayers, and the threats of Nisida.

The conflicting thoughts were indeed sufficient to urge him on to a state of utter despair: his eternal salvation and the happiness of her whom he loved so tenderly were placed in such antagonistic positions, that they raised a fierce—a painful—an agonizing warfare in his breast.

Now he would fall upon his knees and pray—pray long and fervently, for strength to continue in the right path:—then he would give way to all the maddening influences of his bitter reflections: and, while in this mood, had Satan suddenly stood before him, he would have succumbed,—yes—he would have succumbed.

But the fiend had no longer any power to offer direct temptation to the wretched Wagner.

Oh! if he could die—if he could die that moment, how gladly would he release himself from an existence fraught with so much misery:—but death was not yet within the reach of him who bore the doom of a Wehr-Wolf!

The morning dawned; and Fernand Wagner was still pacing the sand,—dreading to meet Nisida again, and not daring to seek to avoid her. Were he to fly to the mountains or the forest; she would search after him; and thus he would only be leading her into perils amidst yawning precipices, or where she might become the prey of the terrible anacondas.

To remain were anguish—to fly were madness!

"Oh! wretch—miserable wretch that I am!" exclaimed Wagner, as he beheld the twilight—so short in the tropics—growing more powerful, and knew that Nisida would soon come forth from the hut.

In a few minutes the orb of day appeared above the orient wave—and almost at the same time the lady made her appearance on the shore.

"Fernand, thou hast not sought repose throughout the night just past!" she said, advancing towards him, and endeavouring to read upon his countenance the thoughts which filled his brain.

"Nisida," he replied, in a rapid and excited tone, "I

have gone through so much during the last few hours, that 'tis a marvel reason has maintained its seat. If thou lovest me, let us forget all those topics which have so strongly excited us both; and let us unite our prayers that heaven will send thee the means to quit this isle and return to thy native land."

"Fernand," said Nisida, in a tone of deep disappointment and reproach, "I was not prepared for this. Your words imply that you possess the power to aid my departure hence, but you have resolved not to use it. Is that your decision?"

"I scorn to deceive thee, Nisida, by a direct falsehood in so serious a matter as this," exclaimed Wagner. "Knowest thou, my beloved, at what price must be purchased the power which alone can enable me to effect thy return to Italy? canst thou divine the immeasurable sacrifice which I must make to satisfy thy wishes?"

"Fernand," answered Nisida, in a reproachful and yet resolute tone, "there is no price that I would not pay to obtain the means of pleasing thee!—there is no sacrifice that I should shrink from were your happiness at stake."

"Nisida," ejaculated Wagner, in a tone of fearful excitement: "you drive me to despair! Have mercy upon me, Nisida—have mercy upon me! My God! if you taunt me—if you reproach me thus, I will do all that you command;—but force me not to believe, Nisida—my well-beloved Nisida—that, in espousing thee in the sight of heaven, I took to my bosom a fiend instead of a woman—a relentless demon in the most charming female shape that evil spirit ever wore. Oh! if you knew all, you would pity me as it is. So wretched on earth, you would not compel me to renounce every hope of salvation: for, know, Nisida," he added, his countenance wearing an expression of indescribable horror,—“know that in demanding of me this last sacrifice, you ordain that I should sell my immortal soul to Satan!”

For a moment Nisida appeared shocked and appalled at the words which met her ears;—but she rather recoiled from the manner of fearful excitement in which they were uttered, than from the intelligence which they conveyed.

"He who truly loves," said she coldly, as she recovered her equanimity, "would make even that sacrifice! And now, listen—Fernand," she continued her eyes flashing fire, and her naked bosom heaving convulsively as she spoke,—while her splendid form was drawn up to its full height, and her whole aspect was sublimely terrible and wondrously beautiful even in that fit of agitated passion,—“listen, Fernand!” she cried, in her musical, flute-like voice, which however assumed the imperious accent and tone of command: “thou art a coward, and unworthy such an earnest—such a profound—such a devoted love as mine, if thou refusest to consummate a sacrifice which will make us both powerful and great as long as we live! Consider, my Fernand!—the spirit with whom thou wouldst league thyself, can endow us with an existence running over centuries to come—can invest us with eternal youth—can place countless treasures at our disposal—can elevate us to the proudest thrones of Christendom! Oh! wilt thou spurn advantages like those? wilt thou refuse to avail thyself of gifts that must render us so supremely happy? No—no:—and then we can return together to my native city—we can enter Florence in triumph,—thou no longer fearing the terrors of the law—I no more compelled to simulate the doom of the deaf and dumb! Our enemies shall lick the dust at our feet—and we shall triumph wherever success may be desirable. Oh! I understand that beseeching, appealing look, Fernand: thou thinkest that I shall love thee less if this immense sacrifice be consummated—that I shall look upon thee with loathing! No—not so: and to convince thee that mine is a soul endowed with an iron will—that mine is an energy which can grapple even with a remorse, I will reveal to thee a secret which thou hast perhaps never even suspected. Fernand!” she exclaimed now becoming absolutely terrible with the excitement that animated her; “Fernand!” she repeated, “’twas I who murdered the girl Agnes in the garden of thy mansion at Florence!”

"Thou!—thou, Nisida!" almost shrieked Wagner wildly: "Oh! no—no! Recall that dreadful avowal! And yet—Oh! yes—I see it all—my former suspicions are confirmed! Wretched woman! what harm did the unfortunate Agnes do to thee?"

"I saw in her a rival, Fernand—or fancied that she was so," answered Nisida: "I overheard your conversation with her that morning in the garden—I saw her embrace thee tenderly—mine ears drank in her words—oh!

I remember them even now! She said, '*Oh! what a night of uneasiness have I passed! But at length thou art restored to me—thou whom I have ever loved so fondly; although I abandoned thee for so long a time.*' Were not those her very words? And thou didst speak to her in a tone equally tender. Ah! I have ever suspected that she was thy mistress—although thou didst swear upon the cross in thy dungeon that she was not! But so great was my love for thee, that I smothered the dread suspicion—

"Suspicion!" repeated Wagner, in the penetrating tone of heartrending anguish,—an anguish so intense that his

easily to enact the spy upon my own father that I originally simulated the doom of the deaf and dumb. A purse of gold induced Dame Margaretha, Antonio's mother, to give me admission into her house; though she also believed that I was really deprived of the faculties of hearing and of speech. But often and often was I concealed in the chamber adjacent to that where my father passed many hours with his mistress;—and it was not without advantage that I so acted. For I discovered that, amongst the presents which he had given her were the jewels which had belonged to my sainted mother; that mother whose wrongs were so manifold, and whose

"SHE SWEEPS THEM ALL WITH A HURRIED GLANCE." (See p. 99.)

brain whirled, and he knew not what he said or did. "Oh! wretched woman! and thou didst slay Agnes on a mere suspicion?"

"I hated her—even before I entertained that suspicion," exclaimed Nisida, impatiently; "for she was the mistress of my father! Thinkest thou that my quick ears had not gleaned the mysterious whisperings which frequently passed between my sire and his valet Antonio, relative to the lady who dwelt in seclusion at the abode of that menial's mother? or thinkest thou that when I once obtained a clue to my father's degrading passion, I scrupled to watch him—to follow him—to learn all his proceedings? No:—for it was the more

sufferings were so great! Yes:—and I possessed myself of those jewels, leaving the girl the other gifts which she had received from my sire. And now, since I am involved in revelations of such import, I shall do well to inform thee, Fernand, that I had seen and loved thee before thou didst come as a visitor to our mansion in Florence. For it was my habit to proceed occasionally to the dwelling of the good Dr. Duras—the depositor of my grand secret of the feigned loss of faculties; and when wandering alone in his garden, I once beheld thee! And the moment I beheld, I loved thee. Often—often after that would I visit the kind physician's grounds, whereof I possessed a pass-key: and my admiration of

thee led me to pass the slight boundary which separated his garden from thine. Then I would approach the windows of thy dwelling, and contemplate thee as thou wast sitting in thy favourite apartment. On the night of my father's funeral—although so very late when all the subsequent business connected with the reading of the will was concluded—my mind was so perturbed and restless that I could not sleep;—and, quitting the Riverola mansion by a private door, I sought the fresh air with the hope that it would calm me. Some vague and indescribable sentiment of curiosity—or else something that I heard on the return of the mourners, relative to the strange scene enacted in the church, I knew not which at this moment—led to the vicinity of your abode: and there—in your favourite room—I beheld you seated, listening attentively to some sweet words, doubtless, which Agnes was breathing in your ear. But she caught a glimpse of my countenance by the light of the lamps—

"Enough! enough!" exclaimed Wagner; "thou hast indeed cleared up innumerable mysteries! But, oh! Nisida—would that thou hadst remained silent—that thou hadst not drawn aside the veil which my elevated opinion of thee had thrown over the suspicions that, I admit, from time to time—"

"And if I have told thee all this, Fernand," interrupted Nisida, impatiently, "it is that thou mayst be convinced not only of the natural energy of my mind, but also of the deep love which I bear thee. And now—now, that thou seest me in my true character—a murderer, if thou wilt," she added, with an emphasis of bitter scorn,—"now canst thou refuse the sacrifice?"

"Nisida! Nisida! enough crime has been perpetrated by both of us, heaven knows!" ejaculated Wagner, still writhing with the anguish produced by the avowal which had so lately met his ears. "Oh! accused be the day—blotted from the annals of Time, be the hour, Nisida, when thy hand struck the fatal dagger into the heart of Agnes."

"What! this to my face!" cried Nisida, her countenance becoming crimson with indignation,—"and not her face only, but her swan-like neck, her shoulders, and her bosom. Then she was thy mistress, Fernand! And thou didst love her, while I fancied, false one that thou art! thine affections to be wholly and solely mine!"

"Nisida!" exclaimed Fernand, cruelly bewildered; "you drive me to despair! I know not whether to loathe thee for this avowal which thou hast made—or to snatch thee to my arms, abandon all hope of salvation, and sacrifice myself entirely to one so transcendently beautiful as thou art! But thy suspicions relative to Agnes are ridiculous—monstrous—absurd! For, as surely as thou art there, Nisida,—as surely as the heaven is above us, and the earth beneath us,—as surely as that I love thee so well as to be unable to reproach thee for the deed which thou hast confessed,—so surely, Nisida, was Agnes my own grand-daughter,—and I—I—Fernand Wagner—young, strong, and full of health as thou now beholdest me, am fourscore and fifteen years of age!"

Nisida started in affright—and then fixed a scrutinizing glance upon Fernand's countenance; for she feared that his reason had abandoned him—that he was raving,

"Ah, Nisida! I see that you do not credit my words," he exclaimed; "and yet I have told thee the solemn, sacred truth. But mine is a sad history and a dreadful fate; and if I thought that thou wouldst soothe my wounded spirit—console, and not revile me—pity, and not loathe me, I would tell thee all."

"Speak—Fernand—speak!" she cried; "and do me not so much wrong as to suppose that I could forget my love for thee—that love which made me the murderer of Agnes! Besides," she added, enthusiastically, "I see that we were destined for each other—that the dark mysteries attached to both our lives engender the closest sympathies—that we shall flourish in power, and glory, and love, and happiness together!"

Wagner threw his arms round Nisida's neck and clasped her to his breast. He saw not in her the woman who had dealt death to his grand-daughter;—he beheld in her only a being of ravishing beauty and wondrous mind,—so intoxicated was he with his passion—so great was the magic influence which she wielded over his yielding spirit!

Then, as her head reclined upon his breast, he whispered to her, in a few hurried but awfully significant words, the nature of his doom, the dread conditions on which he had obtained resuscitated youth, an almost superhuman beauty, a glorious intellect, and the power

of converting the very clods of the earth into gold and precious stones at will!

"And now, dearest," he added, in a low, plaintive, and appealing tone,—and now thou canst divine wherefore on the last day of every month I have crossed these mountains: thou mayst divine, too, how my escape from the prison of Florence was accomplished;—and, though no mortal can abridge my days—and though the sword of the executioner would fall harmless on my neck, and the deadly poison would curdle not the blood in my veins—still man can bind me in chains—and my disgrace is known to all Florence!"

"But thou shalt return thither, Fernand," exclaimed Nisida, raising her countenance and gazing upon him—not with horror and amazement, but in pride and triumph:—"thou shalt return thither, Fernand—armed with a power that may crush all thine enemies, and blast with destructive lightning the wretches who would look slightly on thee! Already thou art dearer—far dearer to me than ever thou wast before;—for I love the marvellous—I glory in the supernatural,—and thou art a being whom such a woman as myself can worship and adore. And thou repinest at thy destiny?—thou shudderest at the idea of that monthly transformation which makes thy fate so grand, because it is so terrible? Oh! thou art wrong—thou art wrong, my Fernand! Consider all that thou hast gained—how many, many years of glorious and magnificent beauty await thee! Think of the power with which thy boundless command of wealth may invest thee! Oh! thou art happy—enviable—blest! But I—I," she added, the impassioned excitement of her tone suddenly shaking into subdued plainness, as her charming head once more fell upon his breast,—"*I am doomed to fade and wither like the other human flowers of the earth! Oh! that thought is now maddening. While thou remainest as thou art now—invested with that fine manly beauty which won my heart when first I saw thee, and before I knew thee—I shall grow old and wrinkled, and thou wilt loathe me! I shall be like a corpse by the side of one endowed with vigorous life. Oh! Fernand—this may not be; and thou canst purchase the power to bestow unperishing youth, unchanging beauty upon me,—the power, moreover, to transport us hence, and to render us happy in inseparable companionship for long, long years to come!*"

"Merciful heavens! Nisida," exclaimed Fernand, profoundly touched by the urgent—earnest appeal of the lovely syren whose persuasive eloquence besought him to seal his own eternal damnation,—"*wouldst thou have me yield my soul to the Enemy of Mankind?*"

"Do you hesitate?—can you even pause to reflect," cried Nisida, with whose tongue the Demon himself was as they were speaking. "Oh! Fernand—you love me not—you have never, never loved me!"

And she burst into a flood of tears.

Wagner was painfully moved by this spectacle, which constituted so powerful an argument to support the persuasive eloquence of her late appeal. His resolution gave way rapidly—the more agonizing became her sobs, the weaker grew his self-command;—and his lips were about to murmur the fatal assent to her prayer—about to announce his readiness to summon the Enemy of Mankind and conclude the awful compact,—when suddenly there passed before his eyes the image of the guardian angel whom he had seen in his vision—dim and transparent as the thinnest vapour, yet still perceptible and with an expression of countenance profoundly mournful.

The apparition vanished in a moment; but its evanescent presence was fraught with salvation.

Tearing himself wildly and abruptly from Nisida's embrace, Wagner exclaimed in a tone indicative of the horror produced by the revulsion of feeling in his mind,—"*No—never—never!*" and, fleet as the startled deer, he ran—he flew towards the mountains.

Frightened and amazed by his sudden cry and simultaneous flight, Nisida cast her eyes rapidly around to ascertain the cause of his alarm, thinking that some dreadful spectacle had stricken terror to his soul.

But, ah! what sees she?—why do her glances settle fixedly in one direction?—what beholds she in the horizon?

For a few instants she is motionless—speechless: she cannot believe her eyes. Then her countenance which has already experienced the transition from an expression of grief and alarm to one of suspense and mingled hope and fear, becomes animated with the wildest joy;—and, forgetting the late exciting scene as completely as if it had never taken place,—but with all her thoughts and feelings absorbed in the new—the one idea which now

engrosses her,—she turns her eyes rapidly round towards the mountains, exclaiming, “Fernand! dearest Fernand! a sail!—a sail!”

But Wagner hears her not: she stamps her foot with impatient rage upon the sand;—and in another moment the groves conceal her lover from her view.

## CHAPTER LX.

### THE FLEET.

YES:—Wagner looked not round—heard not the voice of Nisida invoking him to return—but continued his rapid flight towards the mountains,—as if hurrying in anguish and in horror from the meshes which had been spread to ensnare his immortal soul!

And now Nisida became all selfishness,—there was at length a hope—a sudden hope that she should be speedily enabled to quit the hated, monotonous island; and her fine large, dark eyes were fixed intently upon the white sails which gradually grew more and more palpable in the azure horizon.

She was not deceived: there was no doubt—no uncertainty as to the nature of the object which now engrossed all her thoughts and filled her heart with the wildest joy.

It was indeed a ship—and its course was towards the isle;—for, as she gazed with fixed and longing eyes, it by degrees assumed a more defined shape; and that which had at first seemed to be but one small white piece of canvas, gradually developed the outlines of many sails and showed the tapering spars,—until at last the black hull appeared, completing the form of a large and noble vessel!

Joy! joy!—she would yet be saved from the island! And, ah!—do the chances of that hoped-for safety multiply? Is it indeed another ship which has caught her eye in the far-off horizon! Yes,—and not one only—but another—and another—and another,—until she can count seven vessels, all emerging from the mighty distance, spreading their snow-white canvases to the breeze which wafts them towards the isle!

Crowds of conflicting thoughts now rush to the mind of Nisida; and she seats herself upon the strand to deliberate as calmly as she may upon the course which she should adopt.

Ah!—Fernand—thou wast not then uppermost in the imagination of thy Nisida—although she had not entirely forgotten thee!

But the principal topic of her meditations,—the grand question which demanded the most serious weighing and balancing in her mind,—was whether she should again simulate the deafness and dumbness which she had now for so many months been unaccustomed to affect?

Grave and important interests and a deeply-rooted attachment to her brother on the one side enlarged the necessity of so doing; but, on the other, a fearful disinclination to resume that awful duplicity,—that dreadful self-sacrifice,—an apprehension lest the enjoyment of the faculties of hearing and speech for so long a period should have unfitted her for the successful revival and efficient maintenance of the deceit,—these were the arguments on the negative side.

But Nisida’s was not a mind to shrink from any peril or revolt from any sacrifice which her interests or her aims might urge her to encounter;—and it was with fire-flashing eyes and a neck proudly arching, that she raised her head in a determined manner, exclaiming aloud, “Yes! it must be so! But the period of this renewed self-martyrdom will not last long. So soon as thine interests shall have been duly cared for, Francisco, I will quit Florence for ever—I will return to this island:—and here will I pass the remainder of my days with thee, my beloved Fernand! And that I do love thee still, Fernand—although thou hast fled from my presence as if I were suddenly transformed into a loathsome monster,—that I must ever continue to love thee, Fernand,—and that I shall anxiously long to return to thine arms, are truths as firmly based as the foundations of this island! Thine, then, shall be the last name,—thy name shall be the last word that I will suffer my lips to pronounce ere I once more place the seal upon them! Yes—I love thee, Fernand: oh! would to God that thou couldst hear me proclaim how much I love thee, my beautiful—my strangely-fated Fernand!”

It was almost in a despairing tone that Nisida gave utterance to these last words,—for as the chances of her escape from the island grew every moment less equivocal, by the nearer approach of the fleet, which was

however still far from the shore, the intensity of her sensual passion for Wagner—that passion which she believed to be the purest and most firmly-rooted love—revived; and her heart smote her for her readiness to abandon him to the solitude of that island!

But as she was now acquainted with all the mystery of his fate—as she knew that he could not die for many, many years to come, nor lose that glorious beauty which had proved alike her pleasure and her pride,—her remorse and her alarms were to a considerable degree mitigated! for she thought, within herself, *although she now spoke aloud no more*,—“Death will not snatch him from me—disease will not impair his god-like features and elegant form—and he loves me too well not to receive me with open arms when I shall be enabled to return to him!”

These were her thoughts: and, starting upon her feet, she compressed her lips tightly, as if to remind herself that she had once more placed a seal there—a seal not to be broken for some time!

An hour had now passed since Fernand Wagner and Nisida had separated upon the sea-shore;—and he did not come back. Meantime the fleet of ships had drawn nearer—and, though she more than once entertained the idea of hastening after Wagner, to implore him to accompany her whithersoever these vessels were bound, or at least to part with the embrace of tenderness, yet her fear lest the ships might sail past without touching at the isle, predominated over her softer feelings.

And now, having settled in her mind the course she was to adopt, she hastened to the stores which she had saved from the wreck of the corsair-vessel, and which had been piled up on the strand the day after she was first thrown on that Mediterranean isle.

It will be remembered that amongst the articles thus saved were changes of apparel, which Stefano Verrina had procured for her use at Leghorn ere the corsair-bark set sail on that voyage from which it never returned:—and, during Nisida’s long sojourn on the island, she had frequently examined those garments, and had been careful to secure them from the effects of rain or damp, in the fond hope that the day would sooner or later come when she might assume them for the purpose of bidding adieu to that lovely but monotonous island.

And now that day had come; and the moment so anxiously longed for, appeared to be rapidly approaching.

Nisida accordingly commenced her toilette, as if she had only just risen from her couch and was preparing to dress to go abroad amongst the busy haunts of human beings.

Her dark luxuriant hair, which so long had floated negligently upon her ivory shoulders, was now gathered up in broad massive bands at the sides, and artistically plaited and confined at the back of her well-shaped head. The tight bodice was next laced over the swelling bosom; hose and light boots imprisoned the limbs which had so often borne her glancingly along in their nudity to the soft music of the stream in the vale or of the wavelets of the sea;—and the rich velvet robe, worked with curious embroidery, set off the fine form of Nisida in all the advantage of its glowing, full and voluptuous proportions. Then the large black veil was fastened to the plaits of her hair, whence its ample folds swept over that admirable symmetry of person, and endowing her once more with the queen-like air which became so well her splendid, yet haughty style of beauty!

Yes—no longer subdued by simplicity of attire—no longer tender and soft, was the loveliness of Nisida; but grand, imperious, and dazzling did she now seem again, as erst she seemed ere her foot trod that island-shore.

Apparelled in handsome garments,—and with the rich carnation glow of health and animation on her cheeks, and with her eyes flashing the fires of hope,—but with the vermilion lips compressed, Nisida now stood on that strand where so oft she had wandered like a naiad, feeling no shame at her scant attire.

During the time occupied by her toilette, the fleet of seven ships had approached much nearer to the island, and now they were not more than three miles distant. The hulls, which at first had seemed quite black, shone, as they drew closer, with the gay colours in which they were painted, the gorgeous sun-light playing vividly on the gilding of the prows, the streaks of red and white along the sides, and the splendid decorations of the poop-lanterns.

Noble and mighty ships they were,—ships of a size such as Nisida had never seen before, and in comparison

with which all the merchant vessels she had beheld at Leghorn, were but mere boats.

There was no need to raise a signal to invite them to approach; for that gallant fleet was evidently steering direct towards the island.

Whence did this fleet come? whither was it bound? to what nation did it belong? and would those on board treat her with attention and respect?

Such were the thoughts which now flashed across her brain;—and her heart beat with anxiety for the arrival of the moment which should solve those questions.

Absorbed as she was in the contemplation of the noble ships—those mighty but graceful swans of the ocean,—she did not forget to cast, from time to time, a rapid glance around, to see if Fernand were retracing his way towards her.

Alas! no—he came not,—and she must quit the isle without embracing him,—without assuring him of her constant love,—without renewing her oft-repeated promise to return!

Al! she thought struck her: she would leave a note for him in the hut!

No sooner was the project determined on than she set about its execution; for there were writing materials amidst the stores saved from the corsair-crew.

A brief but tender letter was hastily penned, and then secured in a place where she knew he must find it should he revisit the tenement in which they had so often reposed together.

And that he would revisit it, she both fondly hoped and firmly believed,—revisit it as soon as the excitement and the terror, under the influence of which he had parted from her, should have subsided.

Her mind was now much easier; and her beauty was wonderfully enhanced by the glow of animation which suffused itself over her countenance, giving additional light to her ever brilliant eyes, and rendering her noble aquiline face resplendent to gaze upon.

The ships came to an anchor at a distance of about two miles from the shore; and though the banners of each were fluttering in the breeze, yet Nisida was not well skilled enough in discriminating the flags of different nations to be enabled immediately to satisfy herself to which country that fleet belonged.

But as she stood with her eyes fixed on the foremost vessel, which was also the largest, she observed that there was a gilt crescent in the middle of the blood-red standard that floated over her central poop-lantern: and a chill struck to her heart—for the thought of African pirates flashed to her mind!

This alarm was, however, as evanescent as it was poignant; for another moment's reflection convinced her that none of the princes of Africa could send so proud a fleet to sea. Following up the chain of reasoning thus suggested, and calling to her aid all the accounts she had read of naval fights between the Christians and Moslems, she at length remembered that the blood-red banner, with the gilt crescent in the middle, denoted the presence of the Kapitän-Pacha, or Lord-High Admiral of the Ottoman Empire.

Confidently believing that peace existed between Italy and Turkey, she had now no longer any fears as to the treatment she was likely to experience at the hands of the Mohammedans; and it was with unfeigned joy that she beheld a boat, which had put off from the Admiral's ship, at length approaching the shore.

As the magnificently painted and gorgeously gilt barge, which twenty-four white-turbaned rowers urged along with almost race-horse speed, neared the strand, Nisida observed, beneath a velvet canopy in the stern, a personage, who by his splendid apparel, his commanding demeanour, and the respect paid to him by the slaves accompanying him, was evidently of exalted rank. She accordingly conceived that this must be the Kapitän-Pacha himself. But she was mistaken.

Her delight at the approach of the barge, which she fondly hoped would prove the means of her deliverance from the island, was equalled only by the surprise of those on board at beholding a beautiful and elegantly-dressed lady, unattended and alone, on the sea-shore, as if awaiting their arrival. And during the few minutes which now elapsed ere the barge touched the strand, it was evident that the high functionary seated beneath the canopy surveyed Nisida with increasing wonder and admiration; while she, on her side, could not help noticing that he was remarkably handsome, very young, and possessing a countenance rather of an Italian than a Turkish cast of features.

Meantime a profound silence, broken only by the

slight and uniform sounds produced by the oars, prevailed; and when the boat touched the strand, a long and wide plank, covered with velvet, was so placed as to enable the high functionary before alluded to, to land conveniently.

Attended by two slaves, who followed at a respectful distance, the Mussulman chief advanced towards Nisida, whom he saluted in a manner which strengthened her suspicion that he was not of Turkish origin, although habited in the richest oriental costume she had ever seen, and evidently holding some very superior office amongst the Ottomans.

She returned his salutation with a graceful bow and a sweet smile; and he immediately addressed her in the Italian tongue—her own dear and delightful language—saying, "Lady, art thou the queen of this island? or art thou, as appearances would almost lead me to conjecture, a solitary inhabitant here?"

For he saw that she was alone;—he beheld no traces of culture;—and there was but one miserable dwelling, and that such as she might have built up with her own hands.

Nisida shook her head mournfully, making signs that she was deaf and dumb.

The Mussulman chief uttered an ejaculation of mingled surprise and grief, and surveyed the lady with additional interest and admiration. But in a few moments his countenance assumed a sudden expression of astonishment, as if a light had broken in upon him, suggesting something more than a mere suspicion—nay, indeed, a positive conviction; and having examined her features with the most earnest attention, he abruptly took his tablets from the folds of his garment, and wrote something on them. He then handed them to Nisida; and it was now her turn to experience the wildest surprise;—for on the page opened to her view, were these words, traced in a beautiful style of calligraphy, and in the Italian language:—"Is it possible that your ladyship can be the Donna Nisida of Riverola?"

Nisida eyes wandered in astonishment from the tablets to the countenance of him who had pencilled that question; but his features were certainly not familiar to her!—and yet she thought that there was something in the general expression of that handsome face not altogether unknown to her.

As soon as she had partially recovered from the surprise and bewilderment produced by finding that she at least was partially known to the Ottoman functionary, she wrote beneath his question the following reply:—"I am indeed Nisida of Riverola, who for seven long months have been the only inhabitant of this island, whereon I was shipwrecked; and I am most anxious to return to Italy—or at all events to the first Christian port at which your fleet may touch. Have mercy upon me, then; and take me hence! but who are you, Signor, that I should prove no stranger to you?"

The Ottoman chief read these words, and hastened to reply in the following manner:—"I have the honour to be the Grand Vizier of his Imperial Highness the glorious Sultan Solymán, and my name is Ibrahim. A few months ago I encountered your brother, Francisco, Count of Riverola, who was then in command of a body of Tuscan auxiliaries raised to assist in defending Rhodes against the invading arms of the mighty Solymán. Your brother became my prisoner; but I treated him worthily. He informed me, with bitter tears, of the strange and mysterious disappearance of his well-beloved sister, who has the misfortune to be deprived of the faculties of hearing and speech. Your brother was soon set free, after the fall of Rhodes; and he returned to his native city. But from all he told me of thee, lady, it was natural that I should ere now conjecture who thou wast be."

Ibrahim did not choose to add that he remembered to have seen Nisida occasionally in their native city of Florence, and that he was indeed the brother of her late dependant, Flora Francatelli. But the explanation which he did give was quite sufficient to renew her deepest surprise; as she now learnt for the first time that, during her absence, her brother had been engaged in the perils of warfare.

The Grand Vizier gently withdrew from Nisida's hands the tablets on which her eyes were positively riveted; but it was only to trace a few lines to afford her additional explanations.

When he returned the tablets to her again, she read as follows:—"By a strange coincidence, the glorious fleet which has wafted me hither to deliver you from this beautiful but lonely isle, and which is under the command of Kapitän-Pacha in person, is bound for the western coast

of Italy. Its mission is at present known only to myself and a faithful Greek dependant; but your ladyship shall receive worthy attention and be duly conveyed to Leghorn. The squadron has been driven from its course by a tempest which assailed us off the island of Candia; our pilot lost his reckonings,\* and when land was descried this morning, it was believed to be the coast of Sicily. Hast thou, lady, any means of enlightening us as to the geographical position of this island?"

Nisida answered in the ensuing manner:—"I have not the least notion of the geographical position of the island. An eternal summer appears to prevail in this clime, which would be a terrestrial paradise, were not the forests invested by hideous serpents of an enormous size."

Ibrahim-Pacha, having read this reply, summoned from the barge the officer in command: and to him he communicated the intelligence which he had just received from Nisida.

That officer's countenance immediately underwent a dreadful change; and falling on his knees at Ibrahim's feet, he made some strong appeal, the nature of which Nisida could only divine, by its emphatic delivery, and the terrified manner of the individual,—inasmuch as he addressed the Grand Vizier in the Turkish language.

Ibrahim smiled contemptuously, and motioned the officer with an imperious gesture to rise and return to the barge. Then, again having recourse to the tablets, he conveyed the following information to Nisida:—"Lady, it appears that this is the Isle of Snakes, situate in the Gulf of Sicily, on the African coast. Horrible superstitions are attached to this clime; and I dare not remain longer on this abhorred shore, lest I should seriously offend the prejudices of those ignorant sailors. Come then, lady, and I will convey thee to the Admiral's ship, on board of which you will receive a treatment due to your rank, your beauty, and your misfortunes."

In the meantime the officer had returned to the barge, where whispers speedily circulated in respect to the land on which the boat had touched; and the reader may imagine the extent of the loathing which the mere name of the isle was calculated to inspire in the breasts of the superstitious Mussulmans, when we observe that the existence of that island was well known to the Turks and also to the Africans, but was left uninhabited, and was never visited knowingly by any of their ships.

Nisida saw that the Grand Vizier was in haste to depart,—not through any ridiculous fears on his part, because he was too enlightened to believe in the fearful tales of mermaids, genii, ghouls, vampires, and other evil spirits by which the island was said to be haunted:—but because his renegadism had been of so recent a date, that he dared not, powerful and exalted as he was, afford the least ground for suspecting that the light of Christianity triumphed in his soul over the dark barbarism of his assumed creed.

Seeing, then, that Ibrahim-Pacha was anxious to yield to the superstitious feelings of the sailors, Nisida intimated, with a graceful bend of the head, her readiness to accompany him.

But, as she advanced towards the boat, she cast a rapid and searching glance behind her:—alas! Wagner appeared not!

A feeling of uneasiness—amounting almost to the pang of remorse—took possession of her, as she placed her foot upon the velvet-covered plank;—and for an instant she hesitated to proceed!

Could she abandon Fernand to the solitude of that isle?—could she renounce the joys which his love had taught her to experience? And might she not yet be enabled to persuade him to make that sacrifice which would invest him with a power that she herself would direct and wield according to her own pleasure and suitably to her own interests?

But, oh! that hesitation lasted not more than a moment;—for her feet were on the plank leading to the barge—and at a short distance floated the ship that would bear her away from the isle!

One longing—lingering look upon the shores of that clime where she had enjoyed so much happiness, even if she had experienced so much anxiety: one longing, lingering look, and she hesitated no more!

Ibrahim escorted her to a seat beneath the velvet canopy: the officer in command gave the signal—the

barge was shoved off—the rowers plied their oars—and the island was already far behind, ere Nisida had the courage to glance towards it again!

## CHAPTER LXI.

WAGNER'S MENTAL STRUGGLES.—THE VISION.—THE SIGN FULFILLED.

LET US NOW return to Fernand Wagner, whom we left flying from his Nisida,—flying in horror and alarm from her whom he nevertheless loved so tenderly and devotedly.

He fled as if from the brink of the yawning pit of hell, into which the malignant fiend who coveted his soul was about to plunge him.

Not once did he look back: absorbed as his feelings were in the full conviction of the tremendous peril from which he had just escaped, he still found room for reflection that were he to turn and catch but one glimpse of the beauteous—oh! too beauteous creature, from whom he had torn himself away, he should be lost!

His mind was bent upon the salvation of his immortal soul; and he knew that the Enemy of Mankind was assailing him with a power and with an energy which nothing save the assistance of heaven could enable him to resist. He knew also that heaven helps only those who are willing and anxious to help themselves; and of this doctrine he had received a striking and triumphant proof in the sudden and evanescent appearance of his guardian angel at the instant when, overpowered by the strong, the earnest, and the pathetic pleading of the syren Nisida, he was about to proclaim his readiness to effect the crowning sacrifice.

And it was to avoid the chance of that direful yielding—it was to fly from a temptation which became irresistible when embellished with all the eloquence of a woman on whom he doted, and urged in a voice which no music could surpass,—it was to seek safety, in fine, that Fernand Wagner sped with almost lightning rapidity towards the mountains.

He gained the barrier which divided the Island of Snakes into two equal parts:—he sprang wildly up the precipitous pathway;—and he paused not until he reached the basis of the conical volcano.

There he sat down exhausted; and as he found leisure for reflection—as his thoughts composed themselves and settled down into something like collected calmness—he felt a sensation of indescribable joy at having triumphed over the appalling temptations which had beset him. And in his soul a voice seemed to be singing an anthem of delight and gratitude: and he soon experienced a serenity of mind such as he had not known for many hours past!

When man, having yielded to temptation, succeeds in escaping the perils of the consequences, he beholds a strong motive for self-congratulation:—but how ineffably more sweet is it to be able to reflect that the temptation itself has been avoided in the first instance, and that the dangers of the results have never even been risked.

Thus thought Wagner:—but not for a moment did he attribute to any strength of mind on his own part the escape which had just been effected from the snares set by the Evil One. No: he acknowledged within himself, and with all due humility, that the hand of the Almighty had sustained him in the most trying moment of peril;—and ere he thought of resuming his journey to that side of the island of which Nisida was not, he knelt in fervent prayer.

Rising from his knees, his eyes accidentally swept the sea;—and he was riveted to the spot from which he was about to turn away—for the white sails of the Ottoman fleet met his astonished view. He remained gazing on those objects for some time, until he was convinced they were nearing the island.

For a few moments a deep regret took possession of him:—he should lose his Nisida irrecoverably!

But his next impulse was to wrestle with this feeling—to combat this weakness. How could he have hoped ever to rejoin her without rendering himself again liable to the wifery of her syren tongue—the eloquence of her silver-toned voice—the persuasiveness of her graceful manners? No: it were better that she should depart: it were preferable that he should lose her and preserve his immortal soul!

Thus reasoned he: and that reasoning was effectual. He waited only long enough to assure himself that the fleet was positively approaching the island:—he then

\* The compass, though known to all civilized nations at the period of which we are writing, was not used by the Turks, who associated with it some ridiculous superstition which forbade them from availing themselves of its benefit.



knew that she would not fail to seize that opportunity to depart;—and without permitting himself to yield again to the weakness which had for a few moments threatened to send him back within the sphere of Nisida's fatal influence, he tore himself away from that point amongst the heights which commanded the view of the side of the island where she was.

Hastening round the base of the volcano, he reached the defiles leading to that part of the isle where he had periodically fulfilled his dreadful destiny as a Wehr-Wolf.

It was past noon when he cleared the scene of desolation so frequently alluded to as existing on the acclivity separating the actual range of hills from the verdant portions and fruit-laden groves on that side of the Island of Snakes.

Carefully avoiding the outskirts of the forest, and the knots of large trees, he proceeded towards the shore; and his heart was rent with feelings of deep anguish as he everywhere beheld the traces of destruction left behind him by his recent run in the horrible form of a savage monster.

Then, too, when melancholy thoughts had once again entered his soul, the image of Nisida appeared to flit before him in the most tempting manner; and the more he endeavoured to banish from his memory the recollection of her charms, the more vividly delineated did they become.

At length jealousy took possession of him;—and, suddenly stopping short in his progress towards the shore, he exclaimed aloud, "What if she should be wooed and won by another? If she return to her native land, as assuredly she now will, she may meet some handsome and elegant cavalier who will succeed in winning her affections or exciting her passions;—and I—I, who loved her so well—shall be forgotten! Oh! this is madness! To think that another may possess her—clasp her in his arms—press his lips to hers—feel her fragrant breath fan his cheek—play with the rich tresses of her beauteous hair,—oh! no, no—the bare thought is enough to goad me to despair! She must not depart thus—we have separated, if not in anger, at least abruptly—too abruptly, considering how we have loved, and that we have wedded each other in the sight of heaven! Heaven!" repeated Wagner, his tone changing from despair to a deep solemnity: "Heaven! Oh! I rejoice that I gave utterance to the word;—for it reminds me that to regain my Nisida, I must lose heaven!"

And, as if to fly from his own reflections, he rushed on towards the sea; and there he stopped to gaze, as oft before he had gazed, on the mighty expanse, seeming, in the liquid sun-light, as it stretched away from the yellow sand, a replendent lake of molten silver bounded by a golden shore.

"How like to the human countenance art thou, O mighty sea!" thought Wagner, as he stood with folded arms on the brink of the eternal waters. "Now thou hast smiles as soft and dimples as beautiful as ever appeared on the face of innocence and youth, while the joyous sun-light is on thee. But if the dark clouds gather in the heaven above thee, thou straightway assumest a mournful and a gloomy aspect, and thou growest threatening and sombre. And in how many varied voices dost thou speak, O treacherous and changeful sea! Now thou whisperest softly as if thy ripples conveyed faint murmurs of love;—but, if the gale arise, thou canst burst forth into notes of laughter as thy waters leap to the shore with bounding mirth;—and, if the wind grow higher, thou canst speak louder and more menacingly;—till, when the storm comes on, thou lashest thyself into a fury,—thou boldest with rage,—and thy wrathful voice vies with the rush of the tempest and the roar of the thunder! Deceitful sea,—imaging the beauties, thoughts, and passions of the earth! Within thy mighty depths, too, thou hast gems to deck the crowns of kings and the brows of loveliness; and yet thou cravest for more—more,—and engulfest rich argosies with all their treasures,—thou insatiate sea! And in thy dark caverns are the skeletons of myriads of human beings whom thou hast swallowed up in thy fury; and those bones are trophies which thou retainest in thy fathomless depths, as the heart of man enshrines the relics of those hopes which have wasted away and perished!"

Thus thought Wagner, as he stood gazing upon the sea, then so calm and beautiful, but which he knew to be so treacherous.

When wearied of the reflections which that scene inspired, and not daring to allow his mind to dwell upon

the image of Nisida, he repaired to the nearest grove and refreshed himself with the cooling fruits which he plucked. Then he extended his rambles amongst the verdant plains, and strove strenuously to divert his thoughts as much as possible from the one grand but mournful idea—the departure of Nisida from the island! But vainly did he endeavour to fix his attention upon the enchanting characteristics of that clime;—the flowers appeared to him less brilliant in hue than they were wont to be—the fruits were less inviting—the verdure was of a less lively green—and the plumage of the birds seemed to have lost the bright gloss that rendered its colours so gorgeous in the sun-light. For, oh! the powers of his vision were almost completely absorbed in his mind; and that mind was a mirror wherein were now reflected with a painful vividness all the incidents of the last few hours.

But still he was sustained in his determination not to retrace his way to the spot where he had left Nisida; and when several hours had passed, and the sun was drawing near the western horizon, he exclaimed, in a moment of holy triumph, "She has doubtless by this time quitted the island, and I have been enabled to resist those anxious longings which prompted me to return and clasp her in my arms! O God! I thank thee that thou hast given me this strength!"

Wagner now felt so overcome with weariness, after his wanderings and roamings of many hours,—especially as the two preceding nights had been sleepless for him,—that he sat down upon a piece of low rock near the shore. A quiet, dreamy repose insensibly stole over him:—in a few minutes his slumber was profound.

And now he beheld a strange vision.

Gradually the darkness which appeared to surround him grew less intense; and a gauzy vapour that rose in the midst, at first of the palest bluish tint possible, by degrees obtained more consistency,—when its nature began to undergo a sudden change, assuming the semblance of a luminous mist. Wagner's heart seemed to flutter and leap in his breast, as if with a presentiment of coming joy;—for the luminous mist became a glorious halo, surrounding the beauteous and holy form of a protecting angel, clad in white and shining garments, and with snowy wings drooping gracefully from her shoulders! And ineffably—supernally benign and reassuring was the look which the angel bent upon the sleeping Wagner, as she said in the softest, most melodious tones, "The choir of the heavenly host have hymned thanksgivings for thy salvation! After thou hadst resisted the temptations of the Enemy of Mankind, when he spoke to thee with his own lips, an angel came to thee in a dream to give thee assurance that thou hadst already done much in atonement for the crime that endangered thy soul; but he warned thee then that much more remained to be done ere that atonement would be complete. And the rest is now accomplished, for thou hast resisted the temptations of the Evil One when urged by the tongue and in the melodious voice of lovely Woman! This was thy crowning triumph; and the day when thou shalt reap thy reward is near at hand;—for the bonds which connect thee with the destiny of a Wehr-Wolf shall be broken, and thy name shall be inscribed in heaven's own Book of Life! And I will give thee a sign that what thou seest and hearest now in thy slumber is no idle and delusive vision conjured up by a fevered brain. The sign shall be this:—On awaking from thy sleep, retrace thy way to the spot where this morning thou didst separate from her whom thou lovest; and there shalt thou find a boat upon the sand. That boat will wait thee to Sicily; and there, in the town of Syracuse, thou must inquire for a man whose years have numbered one hundred and sixty-two;—for that man it is who will teach thee how the spell which has made thee a Wehr-Wolf, may be broken." Scarcely had the angel finished speaking, when a dark form rose suddenly near that heavenly being; and Wagner had no difficulty in recognising the Demon. But the Enemy of Mankind appeared not armed with terrors of countenance nor with the withering scorn of infernal triumph: for a moment his features denoted ineffable rage—and then that expression yielded to one of the profoundest melancholy, as if he were saying within himself, "There is salvation for repentant man, but none for me!" A cloud now seemed to sweep before Wagner's eyes;—denser and more dense it grew—first absorbing in its increasing obscurity the form of the Demon, and then enveloping the radiant being who still continued to smile sweetly and benignly upon the sleeping mortal until the glorious countenance and the shining

garments were no longer visible,—but all was black darkness around!

And Fernand Wagner continued to sleep.

Many hours elapsed ere he awoke; and his slumber was serene and soothing.

At length when he opened his eyes and slowly raised his head from the hard pillow which a mass of rock had formed, he beheld the rich red streaks in the eastern horizon, heralding the advent of the sun;—and as the various features of the island gradually developed themselves to his view, as if breaking slowly from a mist, he collected and re-arranged in his mind all the details of the strange vision which he had seen.

For a few minutes he was oppressed with a fear that this vision would indeed prove the delusive sport of his fevered brain; for there seemed to be in its component parts a wild admixture of the sublime and the fantastic. The solemn language of the angel appeared strangely diversified by the intimation that he would find a boat upon the shore,—that this boat would convey him to a place where he was to inquire for a man whose age was one hundred and sixty-two years,—and that this man was the being destined to save him from the doom of a Wehr-Wolf. Then, again, he thought that heaven worked out its designs by means often inscrutable to human comprehension; and he blamed himself for having doubted the truth of the vision. Feelings of joy therefore accompanied the reassurance of his soul; and, having poured forth his thanksgivings for the merciful intervention of Providence in his behalf, he tarried not even so break his fast with the fruits clustering at a short distance from him, but hastened to retrace his way across the mountains, no longer doubting to find the sign fulfilled and the boat upon the shore.

And now these thoughts rose within him:—Should he again behold Nisida? Was the fleet, which he had seen on the previous day, still off the island? Or had it departed, bearing Nisida away to another clime?

He expected not to behold either the fleet or his loved one,—for he felt convinced that the angel would not send him back within the influence of her temptations.

Nor was he mistaken;—for having traversed the volcanic range of heights, he beheld naught to break the uniform and monotonous aspect of the sun-lit sea. But, when drawing nearer to the shore, he saw a dark spot almost immediately in front of the little hut which Nisida and himself had constructed, and wherein they had passed so many, many happy hours.

But the beauteous form of Nisida met not now his eyes: and, deeply,—profoundly,—ardently as he still loved her, and felt he must ever love her so long as the tide of life should flow in his veins,—yet, to speak soothily, he deplored not that she was no longer there. The vision of the previous night had so firmly established hope in his soul, that he had prepared and tutored himself, during his journey across the mountains, to sacrifice all his happiness on earth to ensure the eternal felicity of heaven.

No:—Nisida was not there! But as he drew closer to the shore, he beheld, to his ineffable joy, the dark spot gradually assume that defined shape which left no room to doubt the truth of his vision, even were he inclined to be sceptical. For, there indeed, touching the strand,—but still so far in the water that a slight exertion would send it completely afloat,—was a large boat, curiously shaped, and painted in a wreath of fantastic colours. It had a mast standing—but the sail was lowered; and, on a close inspection, the boat proved to be altogether unimpaired.

"Heaven delights to effect its wise intentions by natural means," thought Wagner within himself. "But surely it could not have been through the agency of Nisida that this boat was left upon the shore? No," he added aloud, after a still closer inspection; "the rope fastened to the prow has been snapped asunder! Doubtless the boat became detached from one of the ships which appeared off the island yesterday,—and which," he said in a low murmuring voice, "have afforded Nisida the means of departure hence!"

He now advanced, with a beating heart, to the hut. The door was closed:—was it possible that Nisida might be within?

Oh! how weak in purpose is the strongest-minded of mortals! For an instant a pleasing hope filled Wagner's breast;—and then again summoning all his resolution to his aid, he opened the door—resolved, should she indeed be there, to remain proof against all the appeals she might make to induce him to sacrifice to their mundane prosperity his immortal soul.

But the hut was empty.

He lingered in it for a few minutes; and the reminiscences of happy hours passed therein swept across his brain.

Suddenly the note which Nisida had left for him met his eyes; and it would be representing him as something far more, or else far less than human, were we to declare that he did not experience a feeling of intense pleasure at beholding that memorial of her love. And tears flowed down his cheeks as he read the following lines:—

"The hour approaches, dearest Fernand, when, in all probability, I shall quit the island. But think not that this hope is unaccompanied by severe pangs. Oh! thou knowest that I love thee;—and I will return to thee, my own adored Fernand, as soon as my presence shall be no longer needed at Florence. Yes: I will come back to thee—and we will not part until death shall deprive thee of me—for I must perish first, and while thou still remainest in all the glory of thy regenerated youth! Alas! thou hast fled from me this morning in anger—perhaps in disgust: but thou wilt forgive me, Fernand, if yielding to some strange influence which I could not control, I urged an appeal so well calculated to strike terror into thy soul. Oh! that I could embrace thee ere I leave this isle; but, alas! thou comest not back—thou hast fled to the mountains! It is, however, in the ardent hope of thy return to this spot, that I leave these few lines to assure thee of my undying affection—to pledge to thee my intention to hasten back to thine arms as soon as possible—and to implore thee not to nourish anger against thy devoted

"NISIDA."

Wagner placed the letter to his lips, exclaiming, "Oh! wherefore did an evil influence ever prove its power on thee, thou loving—loved—and beauteous being! Why was thine hand raised against the hapless Agnes? wherefore did fate make thee a murderess? And why—oh! why didst thou assail me with prayers—tears—reproaches—menaces, to induce me to consign my soul to Satan? Nisida—may heaven manifest its merciful goodness unto thee, even as that same benign care has been extended to me!"

Fernand then placed the letter in his bosom, next to his heart; and, dashing away the tears from his long lashes, began to turn his attention towards the preparations for his own departure from the island. As he approached the pile of stores, he beheld the light draperies which Nisida had lately worn, but which she had laid aside previous to leaving the island; and he also observed that the rich dress, which he had often seen her examine with care, was no longer there.

"How beautiful she must have appeared in that garb!" he murmured to himself. "But, alas! she returns to the great world to resume her former character of the *Deaf and Dumb*!"

Nisida and himself had often employed themselves in gathering quantities of those fruits which form an excellent aliment when dried in the sun; and there was a large supply of these comestibles now at his disposal. He accordingly transferred them to the boat; then he procured a quantity of fresh fruits;—and lastly he filled with pure water a cask which had been saved by Nisida from the corsair-wreck.

His preparations were speedily completed; and he was about to depart, when it struck him that he might never behold Nisida again, and that she might really perform her promise of returning to the island sooner or later. He accordingly availed himself of the writing materials left amongst the stores, to pen a brief but affectionate note, couched in the following terms:—

"Dearest Nisida, I have found, read, and wept over thy letter. Thou hast my sincerest forgiveness, because I love thee more than man ever before loved woman. Heaven has sent me the means of escape from this island; and the doom at which my regenerated existence was purchased, will shortly lose its spell. But perhaps my life may be surrendered up at the same time; at all events, everything is dark and mysterious in respect to the means by which that spell is to be broken. Should we never meet again, but shouldst thou return hither and find this note, receive it as a proof of the unchanging affection of thy

"FERNAND."

This letter was placed in the hut, in precisely the same spot where the one written by Nisida had been left; and

Wagner then hastened to the boat, which he had no difficulty in pushing away from the shore.

Without being able to form any idea of the direction in which the Island of Sicily lay, but trusting entirely to the aid of heaven to guide him to the coast whither his destiny now required him to proceed, he hoisted the sail and abandoned the boat to the gentle breeze which swept the surface of the Mediterranean.

## CHAPTER LXII.

THE KAPITAN-PACHA'S SHIP.—NISIDA AN EAVESDROPPER.  
—A HISTORY OF PAST OCCURRENCES IN FLORENCE.

THE state-cabins—they might more properly be called spacious apartments—occupied by the Grand Vizier, Ibrahim-Pacha, on board the ship of the Lord High Admiral, were fitted up in a most sumptuous and luxurious manner. They consisted of two large saloons in a suite, and from each of which opened, on either side, a number of small cabins, tenanted by the officers immediately attached to the Grand Vizier's person, and the pages and slaves in attendance on him.

The first of the two large saloons was lighted by a handsome coical skylight on the deck: the innermost had the advantage of the stern windows. The drapery—the curtains—the carpets—the sofas—and the hangings were all of the richest materials: the sides and ceilings of the cabins were beautifully painted and elaborately gilt, and the wood-work of the windows were encrusted with thin slabs of variously coloured marbles, on which were engraved the cyphers of the different Lord High Admirals who had hoisted their flags at any time on board that ship. For the state-apartments which we are describing, properly belonged to the Kapitän-Pacha himself; but they had been surrendered to the Grand Vizier, as a mark of respect to the superior rank of this Minister, during his stay on board.

The little cabins communicating with the large saloons, were in reality intended to accommodate the ladies of the Kapitän-Pacha's harem; but Ibrahim did not turn them to a similar use, because it was contrary to Ottoman usage for the Princess Aïsha, being the Sultan's sister, to accompany her husband on any expedition; and he had received so menacing a warning, in the fate of Calanthe, not to provoke the jealousy of Aïsha or the vengeance of her mother, the Sultana-Valida, that he had brought none of the ladies of his own harem with him. Indeed, since the violent death of Calanthe, that harem had been maintained at Constantinople rather as an appendage of his high rank, than as a source of sensual enjoyment.

Nisida of Riverola was treated with the utmost deference and attention by the Grand Vizier, Ibrahim-Pacha; and, on reaching the Lord High Admiral's ship, she was instantly conducted to the innermost saloon, which she was given to understand by signs would be exclusively appropriated to her use. The slaves occupying the small cabins opening therefrom were removed to another part of the ship; and the key of the door connecting the two saloons was handed by the polite Ibrahim to the lady, as a guarantee—or at least an apparent one—of the respect with which she should be treated and the security she might hope to enjoy.

The fleet weighed anchor and set sail again almost immediately after the return of the Grand Vizier to the Admiral's ship; and as she was waited away from the Island of Snakes, Nisida sat at the window of her splendid saloon, gazing at the receding shores, and so strangely balancing between her anxiety to revisit Florence and her regrets at abandoning Fernand Wagner, that while smiles were on her lips, tears were in her eyes, and if her bosom, palpitated with joy at one moment it would heave with a profound sigh at the next.

In the afternoon four male slaves entered Nisida's cabin, and spread upon the table a magnificent repast, accompanied with the most delicious wines of Cyprus and of Greece; and while the lady partook slightly of the banquet, two other slaves appeared and danced in a pleasing style for several minutes. They retired, but shortly returned, carrying in their hands massive silver censers, in which burnt aloes, cinnamon, and other odoriferous woods, which diffused a delicious perfume around. The four slaves who attended at table removed the dishes on splendid silver salvers, and then served sherbet and a variety of delicious fruits; and when the repast was terminated, they all withdrew, leaving Nisida once more alone.

The Island of Snakes had been lost sight of for some hours, and the fresh breeze of evening was playing upon the cheeks of the Lady Nisida as she sat at the open casement of her splendid saloon, watching the ships that followed in the wake of that in which she was, when the sounds of voices in the adjacent cabin attracted her attention; and as the partition was but slight, and the persons discoursing spoke in Italian, she could not help overhearing the conversation which there took place, even if she had possessed any punctilious feelings to have prevented her from becoming a willing listener.

"The Lady Nisida is a magnificent woman, Demetrius," observed a voice which our heroine immediately recognised to be that of the Grand Vizier. "Such a splendid aquiline countenance I never before beheld! Such eyes too—such a delicious mouth—and such brilliant teeth! What a pity 'tis that she has not the use of her tongue. The voice of such a glorious creature, speaking mine own dear native Italian language, would be music itself. And how admirably is she formed; upon somewhat too large a scale, perhaps, precisely to suit my taste, and yet the contours of her shape are so well rounded—so perfectly proportioned in the most harmonious symmetry, that were she less of the Hebe she would be less charming."

"Is your Highness already enamoured of Donna Nisida?" asked the person to whom the Grand Vizier had addressed the preceding observations.

"I must confess that I am, Demetrius," replied Ibrahim: "I would give a year of my life to become her favoured lover for one day. But considering that I hope to see my sister Flora become the wife of Donna Nisida's brother, Francisco, I must restrain this passion of mine within due bounds. But therefore do you sigh thus heavily, Demetrius?"

"Alas! my lord, the mention you made of your sister reminded me that I once possessed a sister also," returned the Greek, in plaintive tone. "But when I returned to Constantinople, I sought vainly for her—and heaven knows what has become of her, and whether I shall ever see her more. Poor Calanthe! some treachery has doubtless been practised towards thee!"

"Do not give way to despair, Demetrius," said the Grand Vizier. "Who knows but that Calanthe may have espoused some youth on whom her affections were set."

"Ah! my lord," interrupted the Greek, "it is considerate—it is kind on the part of your Highness to suggest such a consolatory belief; but Calanthe would not keep a honourable bridal secret. Yet better were it that she should be dead—that she should have been basely murdered by some ruthless robber—than that she should live dishonoured. However, I will not intrude my griefs upon your Highness, although the friendship and the condescension which your Highness manifests towards me, emboldens me to mention these sorrows in your presence."

"Would that I could really console thee, Demetrius!" exclaimed Ibrahim, with well-affected sincerity; "for thou hast shown thyself a sincere friend to my poor sister Flora. And now that we are alone together, Demetrius, for almost the first time since this hastily undertaken voyage began, let us recapitulate in detail all the occurrences which have led me to enter upon the present expedition, the real nature of which you alone know, save my imperial master. And moreover, let us continue to discourse in Italian; for thou canst speak in thy native more fluently than I can express myself in thy native Greek;—besides, it rejoices my heart," he added with a sigh, "to converse in a tongue so dear to me as that of the land which gave me birth. Ah! if Donna Nisida only knew that in the representative of the mighty Solymn she had beheld the brother of her late menial, Flora, how surprised would she be!"

"And it were not prudent that she should learn this fact, my lord," observed Demetrius, "for more reasons than one;—since, from sundry hints which the Signora Francatelli, your lordship's worthy aunt, dropped to me, it is easy to believe that the Donna Nisida was averse to the attachment which her brother Francisco had formed, and that her ladyship indeed was the means of consigning your Highness's sister to the Convent of the Carmelites."

"Albeit I shall not treat Count Francisco's sister the less worthily, now that she is in my power," said Ibrahim-Pacha: "indeed, her matchless beauty would command my forbearance, were I inclined to be vindictive. Moreover, deaf and dumb as she is, she could not obtain the least insight into my plans; and, therefore, she is unable to thwart them."

The reader may suppose that not one single word of all this conversation was lost upon Nisida, who had indeed learnt with extreme surprise—nay, with the most unbounded wonderment—that the high and mighty Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire—a man enjoying an almost sovereign rank, and who bore a title which placed him on a level with the greatest princes of Christendom—was the brother of the detested Flora Francatelli!

During a short pause which ensued in the dialogue between Ibrahim-Pacha and his Greek confidant, Nisida stole gently up to the door in the partition between the two saloons—so fearful was she of losing a single word of

Sipehsalar\* of the armies of the Sultan, I am responsible for my actions to his Majesty alone—yet it is not a small thing, Demetrius, to march an invading force into the heart of Italy, and thereby risk a war with all Christendom. Therefore let us recapitulate and pause to reflect upon every detail of all those incidents which occurred two months ago at Florence.”

“Good, my lord,” said Demetrius. “I will therefore begin with my arrival in that fair city, to which I repaired with all possible despatch so soon as I received the instructions of your Highness. It would appear that the Lord Count of Riverola reached Florence the same

“THE COURSE IS OVER—THE RACE IS RUN.” (See p. 101.)

a discourse that so deeply interested and nearly concerned her.

“But as I was saying ere now, Demetrius,” resumed the Grand Vizier, who, young as he was, had acquired all the methodical habits of a wise statesman—“let us examine in detail the whole posture of affairs in Florence, so that I may maturely consider the precise bearings of the case, and finally determine how to act. For, although I have at my disposal a fleet which might cope with even that of enterprising England or imperious France—though twenty thousand well-disciplined soldiers on board these ships are ready to draw the sword at my nod—and though, as the Seraskier and

day as myself, he having been detained at the outset of his voyage home from Rhodes by contrary winds and a severe storm. It was somewhat late in the evening when I called at the cottage of the Signora Francatelli, your Highness's worthy aunt; for I previously passed a few hours in instituting by indirect means as many inquiries concerning her circumstances and welfare as could be prudently made without exciting suspicion. To my grief, however, I could not ascertain any tidings concerning your Highness's sister: and I therefore came

\* Generalissimo alike of all the infantry and cavalry forces of the Ottoman Empire.

to the mournful conclusion that her disappearance still remained unaccounted for—in a word, that she was irrevocably lost to her anxious relatives. Pondering upon the sad tidings which, in this respect, I should have to forward to your Highness, and having already devised a fitting tale whereby to introduce myself to your lordship's aunt, I went to the cottage, which, as I heard in the course of a subsequent conversation, Don Francisco de Riverola had just quitted. Your Highness's aunt received me with as much cordiality as she could well show towards a stranger. Then, in accordance with my pre-arranged method of procedure, I stated that I was sent by the son of a debtor to the estate of the late Signor Francatelli, to repay to any of his surviving relations a large sum of money which had been so long—so very long owing, and the loss of which at the time had mainly contributed to plunge Signor Francatelli into embarrassment. I added that the son of the debtor having grown rich, had deemed it an act of duty and honour to liquidate this liability on the part of his deceased father. My tale was believed; the case of jewels, which I had previously caused to be estimated by a goldsmith in Florence, was received as the means of settling the fictitious debt; and I was "forthwith a welcome friend at the worthy lady's abode."

"Thy stratagem was a good one, Demetrius," observed the Grand Vizier. But proceed—and fear not that thou wilt weary me with lengthened details."

"I stayed to partake of the evening's repast," continued the Greek: "and the Signora Francatelli grew confiding and communicative, as was nothing more than natural, inasmuch as I necessarily appeared in the light of the agent of a worthy and honourable man, who had not forgotten his obligation to a family that had suffered by his father's conduct. I assured the Signora that the person by whom I was employed to liquidate that debt would be rejoiced to hear of the prosperity of the Francatellis, and I ventured to make inquiries concerning the orphan children of the late merchant."

"Proceed, Demetrius," said the Grand Vizier: "I know wherefore you hesitate—but spare not a single detail."

"Your Highness shall be obeyed," returned the Greek, though now speaking with considerable diffidence. "The worthy lady shook her head mournfully, observing that Alessandro, the son of the late merchant, was in Turkey she believed;—and then she rose hastily, and opening a door leading to a staircase, called to her niece to descend, 'as there was only a friend present.' I was overjoyed to learn, thus suddenly and unexpectedly, that the Signora Flora had reappeared; and when she entered the room, I could scarcely contain my delight beneath that aspect of mere cold courtesy which it became a stranger to wear. The young lady appeared perfectly happy—and, no wonder! For when she had retired, after staying a few minutes in the room, her good aunt, in the fulness of her confidence in me, not only related all the particulars of the Signora Flora's imprisonment in the Carmelite Convent, as I have detailed them to your Highness on former occasion, but also explained to me her motives for so long concealing the young lady's return home. Those motives I have likewise fully narrated to your Highness. The worthy aunt then proceeded to inform me that the Count of Riverola had only returned that same day from the wars—that he had made honourable proposals to her on behalf of the Signora Flora—and that it was intended to sustain the mystery which veiled the young lady's existence and safety in the cottage, until the marriage should have been privately effected, when concealment would be no longer necessary, as it would be then too late for the Count's friends to interfere or renew their persecutions against your lordship's sister. In the course of this conversation which I had with your Highness's aunt, she dropped hints intimating her suspicion that the Lady Nisida was the principal, if not indeed the sole means of those persecutions which had consigned the innocent young maiden to the Carmelite Convent. And the more I reflect upon this point—considering all I know of the affairs under discussion, and all I learnt in Florence relative to Donna Nisida's strange and resolute character—the more I am convinced that she really perpetrated that diabolical outrage."

"Were it not for young Francisco's sake, and that I should bring dishonour into a family with which my sister will, I hope, be soon connected by marriage-ties," exclaimed Ibrahim, "I would avenge myself and my sister's wrongs by forcing the cruel Nisida to yield herself to my arms. But, no—it must not be!"

And Nisida, who overheard every syllable that was uttered, curled her lip haughtily, while her eyes flashed brilliant fire, at the dark menace which the renegade Ibrahim had dared to utter, qualified though it were by the avowal of the motive which would prevent him from putting it into execution.

"No—it must not be," repeated Ibrahim-Pacha, after a pause. "And yet," he added in a musing tone, "she is so wondrously beautiful that I would risk a great deal—endure much—and sacrifice much, also, to win her love! But proceed, Demetrius:—we now come to that portion of the narrative which so nearly concerns my present proceedings."

"Yes, my lord—and God give your Highness success!" exclaimed the young Greek. "Having taken my leave of your excellent aunt, who invited me to visit her again, as I had casually observed that business would detain me in Florence for some time—and having promised the strictest secrecy relative to all she had told me—I repaired to the inn at which I had put up, intending to devote the next day to writing the details of all those particulars which I have thus related, and which I purposed to send by some special messenger to your Highness. But it then struck me that I should only attract undue attention to myself by conducting at a public tavern a correspondence having so important an aspect; and I accordingly rose very early in the morning to sally forth and seek after a secluded but respectable lodging. I eventually, after many inquiries, obtained suitable apartments in the house of a widow known as Dame Margaretha. Her dwelling was situate in an obscure street near the cathedral; and there I immediately took up my abode. Having written my letters to your Highness, I was anxious to get them expedited to Constantinople as speedily as possible; for I was well aware that your Highness would be rejoiced to hear that your beloved sister was indeed in the land of the living—that she was in good health—and that a brilliant marriage was in store for her. I accordingly spoke to Dame Margaretha relative to the means of obtaining a trusty messenger, who, by being well recompensed—partly before he should quit Florence, and fully on his arrival at the place of destination—would undertake a journey to Constantinople. The old woman assured me that her son Antonio, who was a valet in the service of the Count of Arestino, would be able to procure me such a messenger as I required; and in the course of the day that individual was fetched by his mother to speak to me on the subject. Having repeated my wishes to him, he asked me several questions which seemed to indicate a prying disposition and a curiosity as impertinent as it was inconvenient. In fact I did not like his manner at all; but, conceiving that his conduct might arise from sheer ignorance and from no sinister motive, I still felt inclined to avail myself of his assistance to procure a messenger. Finding that he could not sift me, he at length said that he had no doubt a friend of his, whom he named Ventura, would undertake my commission; and he promised to return with that individual in the evening. He then left me; and, true to his promise, he came back. Shortly after dusk, accompanied by this same Ventura. The bargain was soon struck between us; and Ventura promised to set off that very night for Rimini, whence vessels were constantly sailing for Constantinople. I gave him a handsome sum in advance, and also a sealed packet, addressed to your Highness's private secretary, but containing an enclosure, also well sealed, directed to your Highness;—for I did not choose to excite the curiosity of those Italians by allowing them to discover that I was corresponding with the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire. Ventura accordingly left me, promising to acquit himself faithfully of his mission."

"Your plans were all wisely taken," said the Grand Vizier; "and no human foresight could have anticipated other than successful results. Proceed—for, although you have hastily sketched all these particulars before, yet I am anxious to consider them in more attentive detail."

"Having thus disposed of that important business," resumed the young Greek, "I went out to saunter through the streets of Florence, and while away an hour or two in viewing the splendid appearance of that charming city, when lighted up with the innumerable lamps of its palaces and casinos. At length, finding myself dazzled as it were by the illuminations denoting the dwellings of the rich, and satiated with the display of magnificence and wealth in the gay quarters, I entered a dark and obscure street which I knew, by the direction wherein it lay, must lead towards the river. Feeling no

inclination to return to my lodgings to seek repose, I resolved to enjoy the fresh breeze on the bank of the Arno. But I had not proceeded far down the street, when I heard the sound of many steps rapidly approaching from behind, as if of a patrol. I stepped aside under a deep archway, to afford sufficient room for the men to pass along the very narrow street; but as chance would have it they stopped short within a few paces of the spot where I was shrouded in the utter obscurity of the arch. I should have immediately passed on my way, but was induced to stop where I was by hearing a voice which I immediately recognised to be that of Venturo, whom I believed to be already some miles away from Florence. I was perfectly astounded at this discovery; and if I had entertained any doubts as to the identity of that voice, they were speedily cleared up by the conversation which ensued between the men. 'We had better separate here,' said Venturo, 'and break into at least two parties; as at the bottom of this street we shall come within the blaze of the lights of the casinos on the Arno's bank.'—'Well spoken,' returned a voice, which, to my increasing wonder, I recognised to be that of Antonio, my landlady's son: 'you and I, Venturo, will keep together; and our friends can go on first. We will follow them in a few minutes, and then unite again at the angle of the grove nearest to Dame Francatelli's cottage. What say you, Lomellino?'—'Just as you think fit, Antonio,' returned a third person, who I naturally concluded to be the individual addressed as Lomellino. 'You, or rather your master, the Count of Arestino, pays for this business,' he added; 'and so I am bound to obey you.'—'Listen, then,' resumed Antonio: 'the young Count of Riverola, whom I have traced to the cottage this evening, will no doubt be coming away by about the time we shall all meet down there; and, therefore, we shall have nothing to do but to carry him off to the cave.'—'Why is the Count of Arestino so hostile to young Riverola?' demanded the man who had answered to the name of Lomellino.—'He cares nothing about young Riverola, either one way or the other,' replied Antonio: 'but I have persuaded his lordship that if Francisco be left at large, he will only use his influence to mitigate the vengeance of the law against the Countess Giulia, who is the friend of Flora Francatelli; and so the Count of Arestino has consented to follow my advice and have Francisco locked up until the Inquisition has dealt with the Countess, her lover, the Marquis of Orsini, and the Francatellis, aunt and niece.'—'Then you have a spite against this Count Francisco of Riverola, Antonio?' said Lomellino.—'Truly have I,' responded Antonio.—'You remember that night when you, with Stephano Verrina and Piero, got into the Riverola palace some months ago? Well, I don't know who discovered the plot; but I was locked in my room, and next morning young Francisco dismissed me in a way that made me his mortal enemy. And, as a man and an Italian, I must have vengeance. For this purpose I have urged on the Count of Arestino to cause Flora Francatelli, whom Francisco loves and wishes to marry, to be included in the proceedings taken by the Inquisition at his lordship's instigation against the Countess Giulia and the Marquis of Orsini; and the old aunt must necessarily be thrown in, into the bargain, for harbouring sacrilegious persons.'—'And so young Francisco is to lose his mistress Flora, and be kept a prisoner in the cavern till she has been condemned along with the others?' said Lomellino.—'Neither more nor less than what you imagine,' returned the villainous Antonio, with a hideous chuckle; 'and I only wish I had the Lady Nisida also in my power, for I have no doubt that she instigated her brother to turn me off suddenly like a common thief, because, from all you have since told me, Lomellino, I dare swear that it was she who got an inkling of our intentions to plunder the Riverola palace; though how she could have done so, being deaf and dumb, passes my understanding. After all, Flora might have detected the scheme and made it known to her mistress.'—'Well, well,' growled Lomellino, 'it is no use to waste time in talking of the past: let us only think of the present. Come, my men: we will go on first, as already agreed.'—Three or four armed ruffians then put themselves in motion, passing close by the place where I was concealed, but fortunately without discovering my presence.

"Oh! those miscreants would have assuredly murdered you, my faithful Demetrius," said the Grand Vizier.

"Of that, my lord, there is little doubt," returned the young Greek; "and I must confess that I shuddered more than once while listening to the discourse of the cold-blooded monsters. But Venturo and Antonio still remained behind for a few minutes; and the discourse

which took place between them, when their comrades had separated from them, gave me a still farther insight into the characters of the gang. 'Well, Venturo,' said Antonio, after a short pause, 'have you examined the packet which was entrusted to you?'—'I have; and the contents are written in Greek or Arabic, or some such outlandish tongue, for I could not read a word of them,' answered Venturo; 'and so I thought the best thing was to destroy them.'—'You acted wisely,' observed Antonio: 'by the Saints! it was a good thought of mine to introduce you to my mother's lodger as a trustworthy messenger! If he only knew that we had shared his gold and were laughing at him for his credulity, he would not be over well pleased. His purse appears to be well lined; and when we have got all our present business off our hands, we will devote our attention to the lodger. The Arno is deep, and a foreigner the less in the city will not be missed.'—'Not at all,' answered Venturo: 'but let us now hasten to join our companions. At what time are the officers of the Inquisition to visit the cottage?'—'They are no doubt already in the neighbourhood,' replied Antonio, 'and will pounce upon their victims as soon as young Francisco leaves the place. Another set of officers are after the Marquis of Orsini.'—The two miscreants then departed, continuing their conversation in a low tone as they went along the street; but I overheard no more.

"The wretches!" exclaimed the Grand Vizier, in an excited voice. "But vengeance will light upon them yet."

"Heaven grant that they may not go unpunished!" said Demetrius. "Your Highness may imagine the consternation with which I had listened to the development of all the damnable plots then in progress; but I nevertheless experienced a material solace in the fact that accident had thus revealed to me the whole extent of the danger which menaced those whom your Highness held dear. Without pausing to deliberate, I resolved, at all risks, to proceed immediately to the cottage, and, if not too late, warn your aunt and lovely sister of the terrible danger that menaced them. Nay, more—I determined to remove them immediately from Florence—that very night—without an unnecessary moment's delay. Darting along the street, as if my speed involved matters of life and death, I succeeded in passing the two villains, Venturo and Antonio, before they had entered within the sphere of the brilliant illuminations of the casinos in the Vale of Arno; and I heard one say to the other, 'There's some cowardly knave who has just done a deed of which he is no doubt afraid.' Convinced by this remark that they suspected not who the person that passed them so rapidly was, I hurried on with increasing speed, and likewise with augmenting hope to be enabled to save not only your lordship's aunt and sister from the officers of the Inquisition, but also the young Count of Riverola from the power of his miscreant enemies. Alas! my anticipations were not to be fulfilled! I lost my way amongst a maze of gardens connected with the villas bordering on the Arno; and much valuable time—time vitally valuable at such a crisis—was wasted in the circuits which I had to make to extricate myself from the labyrinth and reach the bank of the river. At length I drew within sight of the cottage; but my heart beat with terrible alarm as I beheld the lights moving rapidly about the house. 'It is too late!' I thought; and yet I rushed on towards the place. But suddenly the door opened, and by the glare of a light within I saw three females, closely muffled in veils, led forth by several armed men. It instantly struck me that the third must be the Countess Giulia of Arestino to whom I had heard the miscreants allude. I stopped short—for I knew that any violent demonstration or interference on my part would be useless, and that measures of another kind must be adopted on behalf of the victims. As the procession now advanced from the cottage, I concealed myself in the adjacent grove, wondering whether Count Francisco had been already arrested, or whether he had managed to elude his enemies. The procession, consisting of the officers of the Inquisition, with their three female prisoners, who were dragged rather than led along, passed by the spot where I was concealed; and the deep sobs which came from the unfortunate ladies, gagged though they evidently were, filled my heart with horror and anguish. As soon as they had disappeared, I struck farther into the grove, knowing by its situation that the outlet on the other side would conduct me to the nearest road to the quarter of the city in which I lodged. But scarcely had I reached the outskirts of the little wood in the direction which I have named when I saw a party of men moving on in front of me through



the obscurity of the night. It struck me that this party might consist of Antonio, Ventura, and the other worthies; and I determined to ascertain whether Count Francisco had fallen into their hands. I accordingly followed them as cautiously as possible, taking care to skirt the grove in such a manner that I was concealed by its deep shade, whereas those whom I was watching proceeded farther away from the trees. Thus the party in advance and myself continued our respective paths for nearly a quarter of an hour, during which I had ascertained beyond all doubt that the men whom I was following were really the villains of the Antonio gang, and that they had a prisoner amongst them who could be none other than the Count of Riverola. At length the grove terminated; and I was about to abandon farther pursuit, as dangerous;—when it struck me that I should be acting in a certain locality of the cave of which I endeavoured to ascertain the locality of the cave of which I had heard the miscreants speak, and to which they were most probably conveying him who was so dear to the beautiful Signora Flora. Accordingly, by exercising the greatest caution, I managed to track the party across several fields to a grove of evergreens. Now my task of pursuit became far more difficult; and I confess that I trembled at the danger I was incurring in acting the spy upon such desperate men. But as they advanced without caring how they broke through the cracking thickets, the noise of their movements absorbed the far fainter sounds which accompanied my progress: and I moreover picked my way as carefully as possible. So successful was my undertaking, terribly hazardous as it was, that when the party at length stopped, about a quarter of an hour after having first entered this grove, I was within twenty paces of them. But it was profoundly dark amidst that dense foliage, through which I had tracked them by ear and not by eye; and I was unable to observe their movements. A few minutes elapsed, during which I computed the distance they were from me, and calculated so as to form an idea of the exact spot where they were standing; for, by an observation which one of the villains let drop, I learnt that they had reached the entrance to their cavern. It also struck me that I had heard a bell ring as if in the depths of the earth; and, granting the suspicion to be correct, I concluded that this was a signal made to obtain admittance or to give notice of their coming. While I was weighing all these matters in my mind, Lomellino suddenly exclaimed, "Let the prisoner be taken down first; and have a care, Ventura, that the bandage is well fastened."—"All right, Captain," was the reply; and thus I ascertained that Lomellino was the chief of some band, most probably, I thought, of robbers—for I remembered the allusions which had been made that evening by Antonio to a certain predatory visit some months previously to the Riverola mansion.—"God help Francisco!" I said within myself, as I reflected upon the desperate character of the men who had him in their power: and then I was consoled by the remembrance that he was merely to be detained a prisoner for a period, and not harmed.

"Unfortunately such demons as those Florentine banditti are capable of every atrocity," observed the Grand Vizier.

"True, my lord," returned Demetrius: "but let us hope that all those in whom your Highness is interested will yet be saved. I shall however continue my narrative. Three or four minutes had elapsed since the robbers had come to a full stop, when I knew by the observations made amongst them, that they were descending into some subterranean place. I accordingly waited with the utmost anxiety until I was convinced they had all disappeared with their prisoner; and then I crept cautiously along to the place at which I had already reckoned them to have paused. I stooped down, and carefully felt upon the ground, until I was enabled to ascertain the precise point at which the marks of their footsteps had ceased. At this moment the moon shone forth with such extreme brilliancy, that its beams penetrated the thick foliage; and I now observed, with feelings of indescribable horror, that I had advanced to the very verge of a steep precipice, on the brink of which the grove suddenly ceased. Had not the moon thus providentially appeared at that instant, I should have continued to grope about in the utter darkness, and have assuredly fallen into the abyss. I breathed a hasty, but not the less fervent prayer for this signal deliverance, and then continued my researches. But not a trace of any secret entrance to a cavern could I find—no steps—no trap-door! Well aware that it would be dangerous for me to be caught in that spot, should any of the banditti emerge suddenly from their cave, I

was reluctantly compelled to depart. But before I quitted the place, I studied it so well, that I should have no difficulty in recognising it again. In fact, just at the precise spot where the footsteps of the banditti ceased, an enormous chestnut tree, which for years making more than a century must have continued to draw from the earth its mighty nourishment, slopes completely over the precipice, in the hard soil on the verge of which its roots are firmly fixed; while on the right of this tree, as you face the abyss, is a knot of olives, and on the left an umbrageous lime. These features of the spot I committed to memory, with the idea that such a clue to the robbers' retreat might not eventually prove useless."

"I will extirpate that nest of vipers—that horde of remorseless banditti!" exclaimed Ibrahim-Pacha, in a tone indicative of strong excitement.

"Your Highness has the power," responded Demetrius; "but the Florentine authorities must be completely impotent in respect to such a formidable horde of desperate and lawless men. The remainder of my narrative is soon told, my lord," continued the young Greek. "I returned to my lodgings in safety—but well-determined, for more reasons than one, not to remain there a single hour longer than was necessary. For apart from the resolve which I had formed already, in consequence of the various and unforeseen incidents which had occurred, to return to Constantinople without delay, the murderous designs of Antonio and Ventura, in respect to myself, would have hastened my removal, at all events, to another lodging. That night sleep never visited my eyes, so horrified and alarmed—so amazed and grieved was I at the calamities which had befallen those who were so dear to your Highness. Very early in the morning, I arose from a feverish bed, and in pursuance of plans which I had devised during the sleepless hours of night, I sallied forth to ascertain if I could learn any tidings of the Marquis of Orsini. 'For,' thought I, 'if this nobleman has escaped arrest by the officers of the Inquisition, he might be enabled to effect somewhat in aiding the female victims.'—But I heard at his dwelling that he had been arrested the previous evening on a charge of sacrilege, perpetrated with others, in respect to the Carmelite Convent. Frustrated in this quarter, I repaired to the principal clerk of the criminal tribunal, and inquired the name and address of a lawyer of eminence and repute. The clerk complied with my demand, and recommended me to Angelo Duras, the brother of a celebrated Florentine physician."

"Both of whom are well known to me by name," observed the Grand Vizier; "and Angelo Duras is a man of unblemished integrity. It delights me much to know that you have employed him."

"I found him, too," continued Demetrius, "a kind-hearted and benevolent man. He received me with affability; and I narrated to him as much as it was necessary for him to know of all the particulars which I have detailed to your Highness. Without stating by whom I was employed,—and, indeed, without making the least allusion to your Highness,—I merely represented to him that I was deeply interested in the Francatelli family, and that it was of the utmost importance to obtain a delay for at least two or three months in the criminal proceedings instituted against those innocent females,—as, in the meantime, I should undertake a journey to a place at some considerable distance, but the result of which would prove materially beneficial to the cause of the accused. He observed that the interest of the Count of Arestino, who would doubtless endeavour to hasten the proceedings in order to wreak speedy vengeance upon his wife and the Marquis of Orsini, was very powerful to contend against; but that gold could accomplish much. I assured him that there would be no lack of funds to sustain even the most expensive process; and I threw down a heavy purse as an earnest of my ability to bear the cost of the suit. He committed to paper all the particulars I had thought it prudent to reveal to him, and after some consideration said, 'I now see my way clearly. I will undertake that the final hearing of this case, at least so far as it regards the Francatellis, shall be postponed for three months. You may rely upon the fulfilment of this promise, let the Count of Arestino do his worst.' Thus assured I quitted the worthy pleader, and proceeded to visit Father Marco, who, as I happened to learn when in conversation with your Highness's aunt, was the family confessor. I found that excellent man overwhelmed with grief at the calamities which had occurred; and to him I confided, under a solemn promise of inviolable secrecy, who the present Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire really was, and how I had been

employed by your Highness to visit Florence for the purpose of watching over the safety of your relatives. I however explained to Father Marco that his vow of secrecy was to cease to be binding at any moment when the lives of the Fracatellis should be menaced by circumstances that might possibly arise in spite of all the precautions I had adopted to postpone the final hearing of their case; and that should imminent peril menace those lives, he was immediately to reveal to the Duke of Florence the fact of the relationship of the Fracatellis with one who had power to punish any injury that might be done to them. Though well knowing, my lord, the obstinacy of the Christian States in venturing to beard Ottoman might, I considered this precaution to be at all events a prudent one; and Father Marco promised to obey my injunctions in all respects."

"I was not mistaken in thee, Demetrius," said the Grand Vizier, "when I chose thee for that mission on account of thy discreteness and foresight."

"Your Highness's praises are my best reward," answered the Greek. "I had now done all that I could possibly effect or devise under the circumstances which prompted me to think or act; and it grieved me that I was unable to afford the slightest assistance to the young Count of Riverola. But I dared not wait longer in Italy; and I was convinced that the authorities of Florence were too inefficient to root out the horde of banditti, even had I explained to them the clue which I myself obtained to the stronghold of those miscreants. I accordingly quitted Florence in the afternoon of the day following the numerous arrests which I have mentioned, and had I not been detained so long at Rimini, by adverse winds, your Highness would not have been kept for so many weeks without the mournful tidings which it was at length my painful duty to communicate in person to your lordship."

"That delay, my faithful Demetrius," said the Grand Vizier, "was no fault of thine. Fortunately the squadron was already equipped for sea; and, instead of repairing to the African frontiers to chastise the daring pirates, it is on its way to the Tuscan coast, where, if need be, it will land twenty thousand soldiers to liberate my relations and the young Count of Riverola. A pretext for making war upon the Italian States has been afforded by their recent conduct in sending auxiliaries to the succour of Rhodes; and of that excuse I shall not hesitate to avail myself to commence hostilities against the proud Florentines, should a secret and peaceful negotiation fail. But now that thou hast recapitulated to me, in minute detail, all those particulars which thou didst merely sketch forth at first, it seems to me fitting that I anchor the fleet at the mouth of the Arno, and that I send thee, Demetrius, as an Envoy in a public capacity, but in reality to stipulate privately for the release of those in whom I am interested."

Thus terminated the conference between Ibrahim-Pacha and his Greek dependant,—a conference which had revealed manifold and astounding occurrences to the ears of the Lady Nisida of Riverola.

ASTOUNDING indeed!

Francisco in the hands of the formidable banditti—Flora in the prison of the Inquisition—and the Ottoman Grand Vizier bent upon effecting the marriage of those two—a marriage which Nisida abhorred,—these tidings were sufficient to arouse all the wondrous energies of that mind which was so prompt in combining intrigues and plots, so resolute in carrying them out, and so indomitable when it had formed a will of its own.

Ominous were the fires that flashed in her fine large dark eyes, and powerful were the workings of those emotions which caused her heaving bosom to swell as if about to burst the bodice which confined it,—when, retreating from the partition door between the two saloons, and resuming her seat at the cabin-windows to permit the evening breeze to fan her fevered cheek, Nisida thought within herself, "It was indeed time that I should quit that accursed island, and return to Italy!"

#### CHAPTER LXIII.

##### THE GRAND VIZIER AND THE SPY.—THE SLEEPER IN THE BOAT.

THE roseate streaks, which the departing glories of a Mediterranean sunset left lingering for a few minutes in the western horizon, were yielding to the deeper gloom of evening,—a few days after the scene related in the preceding chapter,—as Nisida rose from her seat at the

open windows of her splendid saloon on board the Ottoman Admiral's ship, and began to lay aside her apparel, preparatory to retiring to rest.

She was already wearied of the monotonous life of ship-board; and the strange revelations which the discourse between Ibrahim-Pacha and Demetrius had developed to her ears, rendered her doubly anxious to set foot once more upon her native soil.

The Grand Vizier had paid his respects to her every day since she first embarked on board the Turkish ship; and they exchanged a few observations, rather of courtesy than of any deeper interest, by means of the tablets.

Ibrahim's manner towards her was respectful;—but when he imagined himself to be unperceived by her, his eyes were suddenly lighted up with the fires of ardent passion, and he devoured her with his burning glances. She failed not to notice the effect which her glorious beauty produced upon him; and she studiously avoided the imprudence of giving him the least encouragement;—not from any innate feeling of virtue,—but because she detested him as a man who was bent on accomplishing a marriage between her brother and Flora Fracatelli. This hatred she, however, concealed beneath an appearance of modest reserve; and even the eagle-sighted Ibrahim perceived not that he was in any way displeasing to the lovely Nisida.

With the exception of the Grand Vizier, and the slaves who waited upon her, the lady saw no one on board ship; for she never quitted the magnificent saloon allotted to her, but passed her time chiefly in surveying the broad sea and the other vessels of the fleet from the windows, or in meditating upon the course which she should pursue on her arrival in Florence.

But let us return to the thread of our narrative.

The last tints of sunset were, we said, fading away, when the lady Nisida of Riverola commenced her preparations for retiring to rest. She closed the casement, satisfied herself that the partition door between the two saloons was well secured, and then threw herself upon the voluptuous couch spread in one of the smaller cabins opening from her own spacious and magnificent apartment.

She thought of Fernand—her handsome Fernand, whom she had abandoned on the Isle of Snakes; and profound sighs escaped her. Then she thought of Francisco; and the idea of serving that much-loved brother's interests afforded her a consolation for having thus quitted the clime where she had passed so many happy days with Wagner.

At length sleep fell upon her, and closed over the large, dark, brilliant eyes the white lids, beneath the transparent skin of which the blue veins were so delicately traced; and the long jetty lashes reposed on the cheeks which the heat of the atmosphere tinged with a rich carnation glow.

And when the moon arose that night, its silver rays streamed through the window set in the port-hole of that small side-cabin,—streamed upon the beauteous face of the sleeper!

But, hark!—there is the light, light sound of a footfall in the saloon from which that cabin opens!

The treacherous Ibrahim possesses two keys to the partition-door;—and, having successfully wrestled with his raging desires until this moment, he is at length no longer able to resist the temptation of invading the sanctity of Nisida's sleeping-place.

Already has he set his foot upon the very threshold of the little side-cabin, having traversed the spacious saloon,—when a hand is laid upon his shoulder, and a voice behind him says in a low tone, "Your Highness has forgotten the fate of the murdered Calantha!"

Ibrahim started—shook the hand from off him—and exclaimed, "Dog of a negro! what and who have made thee a spy upon my actions?"

At the same instant that Ibrahim felt the hand on his shoulder, and heard the well-known voice uttering the dreadful warning in his ears, Nisida awoke. Her first impulse was to start up; but checking herself with wondrous presence of mind, as the part of the deaf and dumb which she had imposed upon herself to play, dashed with lightning velocity across her brain,—comprehending too in an instant, that the Grand Vizier had violated her privacy, but that some unknown succour was at hand, as the rapid exchange of the words above recorded met her ears,—she remained perfectly motionless, as if still wrapped up in an undisturbed slumber.

The grand Vizier, and the individual whom he had in his rage addressed as a "dog of a negro," retreated into the saloon, Ibrahim holding her breath so as not to lose a

word that might pass between them should their dialogue be resumed.

"Your Highness asks me what and who have made me a spy upon your actions," said the negro, in his low monotonous voice, and speaking with mingled firmness and respect. "Those questions are easily answered! The same authority which ordered me to wrest from thine arms, some months past, the lady who might be unfortunate enough to please your Highness's fancy, exercises an unceasing supervision over you, even in this ship, and in the middle of the mighty sea. To that authority all your deeds and acts are matters of indifference, save those which would render your Highness faithless to an adoring wife. Remember, my lord, the fate of Calanthe—the sister of your dependant Demetrius,—she who was torn from your arms, and whose beauteous form became food for the fishes of the Bosphorus."

"How knew you who she was?" demanded the Grand Vizier, in a low hoarse voice, the powers of his utterance having been temporarily suspended by the rage that filled his soul at finding his iniquitous design in respect to Nisida thus suddenly baffled by the chief of the three black slaves, whose attendance in this expedition had been forced upon him by the Sultan, at the instigation of the Sultana-Valida:—"how knew you who she was?" he again asked.

"Rather demand, my lord, what can escape the prying eyes of those by whom your Highness has been surrounded ever since the seals of office were in your grasp!" returned the slave, in a cool, imperturbable manner.

"But you would not betray that secret to Demetrius who is now devoted to me—who is necessary to me—and who would loathe me, were he to learn the dreadful fate of his sister!" said the Grand Vizier, with rapid and excited utterance.

"I have no eyes and ears, great Pacha," answered the negro, "save in respect to those matters which would render you faithless to the sister of the Sultan."

"Would to heaven that you had neither eyes nor ears at all—that you did not exist, indeed!" exclaimed Ibrahim, unable to repress his wrath: then, in a different and milder tone, he immediately added, "Slave, I can make thee free—I can give thee wealth—and thou mayest dwell in happy Italy, whither we are going, for the remainder of thy days. Reflect, consider! I live that deaf and dumb Christian woman, who sleepeth there—I already love her to distraction! Thwart me not, good slave—and thou mayest command my eternal gratitude."

"My lord, two other slaves overhear every word that now passes between us," responded the Ethiopian, his voice remaining calm and monotonous; "and even were we alone in all respects, I would not betray the trust reposed in me. But not on your Highness would the effects of your infidelity to the Princess Aïscha fall. No, my lord, I have no authority to harm you. Had your Highness succeeded in your purpose ere now, the bow-string would have for ever stifled the breath in the body of that deaf and dumb Christian lady; and her corpse would have been thrown forth from these windows into the sea. Such are my instructions, my lord; and thus every object of your sated passion must become its victim also."

"Better—better were it," exclaimed Ibrahim, in a tone denoting the profoundest mental anguish, "to be the veriest mendicant who implores alms at the gate of the Mosque of Saint Sophia, than the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire!"

With these words, he rushed into the adjoining saloon, the negro following and fastening the door behind him. Nisida now began to breathe freely once more.

From what perils had she escaped! The violation of her couch by the unprincipled Ibrahim, would have been followed by her immediate assassination at the hands of the Ethiopian whom the Sultana-Mother had placed as a spy on the actions of her son-in-law. On the other hand, she felt rejoiced that the incident of this night had occurred; for it had been the means of revealing to her a secret of immense importance in connexion with the Grand Vizier. She remembered the terms of grief and affection in which Demetrius had spoken of the disappearance of Calanthe; and she had heard enough on that occasion to convince her that the Greek would become the implacable enemy of any man who had wronged that much-loved sister. How bitter, then, would be the hatred of Demetrius—how dreadful would be the vengeance which he must crave against him whose passions had led to the murder of Calanthe! Yes—Ibrahim, thy secret

was now in the possession of Nisida of Riverola,—in the possession of that woman of iron mind and potent energy, and whom thou fondly believest to be deaf and dumb!

Nisida slept no more that night, the occurrences of which furnished her with so much food for profound meditation; and with the earliest gleam of dawn that tinged the eastern heaven, she rose from her couch.

Entering the saloon, she opened the windows to admit the gentle breeze of morning; and ere she commenced her toilette, she lingered to gaze upon the stately ships that were ploughing the blue sea in the wake of the Admiral's vessel wherein she was.

Suddenly her eyes fell upon what appeared to be a black speck at a little distance;—but as this object was moving rapidly along on the surface of the Mediterranean, it soon approached sufficiently near to enable her to discern that it was a boat impelled by a single sail.

Urged by an undefinable and yet a strong sentiment of curiosity, Nisida remained at the saloon window, watching the progress of the little bark, which bounded over the waves with extraordinary speed, bending gracefully to the breeze that thus wafted it onward.

Nearer and nearer towards the vessel it came, though not pursuing exactly the same direction:—and in five minutes it passed within a few yards of the stern of the *Kapitan-Pacha's* ship.

But, oh! wondrous and unaccountable fact! There—stretched upon his back in that bounding boat, and evidently buried in a deep slumber,—with the rays of the rising sun gleaming upon his fine and now slightly flushed countenance,—lay he whose image was so indelibly impressed upon the heart of Nisida—her handsome and strangely-fated *Fernand Wagner*.

The moment the conviction that the sleeper was indeed he struck to the mind of Nisida, she would have called him by name—she would have endeavoured to awake him, if only to exchange a single word of fondness,—for her assumed dumbness was for the instant forgotten;—but she was rendered motionless and retained speechless—stupefied, paralyzed as it were—with mingled wonder and joy,—wonder that he should have found the means to escape from the island, and joy that she was thus permitted to behold him at least once again!

But the pleasure which this incident excited in her mind, was transitory indeed; for the boat swept by, as if urged on by a stronger impulse than the gentle breeze of the morning—and in another minute Nisida beheld it no more!

## CHAPTER LXIV.

### THE TALKATIVE BARBER.

THE sun was setting behind the western hills of Sicily, as *Fernand Wagner* entered the squalid suburb which at that period stretched from the town of Syracuse to the sea.

His step was elastic, and he held his head high;—for his heart was full of joyous and burning hope.

Hitherto the promises of the angel who had last appeared to him were completely fulfilled. The boat was wafted by a favouring breeze direct from the Island of Snakes to the shore of Sicily; and he had landed in the immediate vicinity of Syracuse—the town at which a farther revelation was to be made in respect to the breaking of the spell which had fixed upon him the frightful doom of a *Wehr-Wolf*!

But little suspected *Fernand Wagner* that, one morning while he slept, his boat had borne him through the proud fleet of the Ottomans—little wist he that his beloved Nisida had caught sight of him as he was wafted rapidly past the stern of the *Kapitan-Pacha's* ship!

For on that occasion he had slept during many hours; and when he had awakened, not a bark nor a sail save his own was visible on the mighty expanse of water.

And now it was with elastic step and joyous heart that the hero of our tale entered the town of Syracuse. But suddenly he remembered the singular nature of the inquiry which he was there to make,—an inquiry concerning a man whose years had numbered one hundred and sixty-two!

"Nevertheless," thought *Wagner*, "that good angel, who gave me a sign whereby I should become convinced of the reality of her appearance, and whose promises have been all fulfilled up to this point, could not possibly mislead me. No: I will obey the command which I received—even though I should visit every human

dwelling in the town of Syracuse! For heaven works out its wise purposes in wondrous manners; and it is not for me to shrink from yielding obedience to its orders, nor to pause to question their propriety. And, oh! if I can but shake off that demon-influence which weighs upon my soul,—if I can but escape from the shackles which still enchain me to a horrible doom,—how sincere will be my thanks to heaven—how unbounded my rejoicings!”

As Wagner had reached this point in his meditations, he stopped at the door of a barber's shop of mean appearance,—the pole, with the basin hanging to it, denoting that the occupant of the place combined, as was usual in those times, the functions of shaver and blood-letter or surgeon.

Having hastily surveyed the exterior of the shop, and fancying that it was precisely the one at which his inquiries should commence,—barbers in that age being as famous for their gossiping propensities as in this,—Fernand entered, and was immediately accosted by a short, sharp-visaged, dark-complexioned old man, who pointed to a seat, saying in a courteous, or rather obsequious tone, “What is your will, signor?”

Fernand desired the barber-surgeon to shave his superfluous beard and trim his hair; and while that individual was preparing his lather and sharpening his razor in the most approved style of the craft, Wagner asked, in a seemingly careless tone, “What news have you, good master, in Syracuse?”

“Naught of importance, signor,” was the reply; “mere every-day matters. Syracuse is indeed wretchedly dull. There were only two murders and three attempts at assassination reported to the Lieutenant of Police this morning; and that is nothing for a town usually so active and bustling as ours. For my part, I don't know what has come over the people! I stepped as far as the dead-house just now to view the body of a young lady, unclaimed as yet, who had her head nearly severed from the trunk last night; and then I proceeded to the great square to see whether any executions are to take place to-morrow; but really there is nothing of any consequence to induce one to stir abroad in Syracuse, just at this moment.”

“Murders and attempts at assassination are matters of very common occurrence amongst you, then?” said Wagner, inquiringly.

“We get a perfect surfeit of them, signor,” returned the barber, now applying the soap to his customer's face. “They fail to create any sensation now, I can assure you. Besides, one gets tired of executions.”

“Naturally enough,” said Fernand. “But I have heard that there are some very extraordinary personages in Syracuse; indeed that there is one who has lived to a most remarkable age—”

“The oldest person I know of is the Abbot of St. Mary's,” interrupted the barber: “and he—”

“And he—?” repeated Wagner, with feverish impatience.

“Is ninety-seven and three months, signor—a great age truly,” responded the shaver-surgeon.

Fernand's hopes were immediately cooled down; but thinking that he ought to put his inquiry in a direct manner, he said, “Then it is not true that you have in Syracuse an individual who has reached the wondrous age of a century three-score and two?”

“Holy Virgin have mercy upon you, signor!” ejaculated the barber, “if you really put faith in the absurd stories that people tell about the Rosicrucians!”

“Ah! then the people of Syracuse do talk on such matters?” said Wagner, conceiving that he had obtained a clue to the aim and object of his inquiry.

“Have you never heard, signor, of the Order of the Rosy Cross?” demanded the barber, who was naturally of a garrulous disposition, and who now appeared to have entered on a favourite subject.

“I have heard, in my travels, vague mention made of such an Order,” answered Fernand: “but I never experienced any curiosity to seek to learn more—and, indeed, I may say that I know nothing of the Rosicrucians save their mere name.”

“Well, signor,” continued the barber, “for common pastime-talk it is as good a subject as any other; but no one shall ever persuade me either that there really is such an Order as the Brothers of the Rosy Cross, or that it is possible for human beings to attain the powers attributed to that fraternity.”

“You interest me much by your remarks, good leech,” exclaimed Fernand: “I pray you to give me further explanation.”

“With infinite pleasure, signor,—since you appear to desire it,” returned the barber, still pursuing his tonorial duties. “You must know that there are many wild legends and stories abroad concerning these invisible beings denominated Rosicrucians. But the one which gains most general credence is that the Brotherhood was founded by a certain Christianus Rosencrucx, a German philosopher, who fancied that the arts and sciences might be developed in such a manner as to confer the greatest possible blessings on the human race.”

“Then the aims of Rosencrucx were entirely good and philanthropic?” said Wagner, interrogatively.

“As a matter of course, signor,” replied the barber: “and therefore, if such a man ever did live, he must have been an insane visionary—for who would believe that knowledge could possibly make us richer, happier, or better? All the philosophy in the universe would never convert this shop into a palace.”

“But you are wandering from your subject, my good friend,” observed Fernand, in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

“I crave your pardon, signor. Let me see? Oh! I recollect—we were talking of Christianus Rosencrucx. Well, signor—this fabled philosopher was a monk, and a very wise as well as a very good man. I am only telling you the most generally-received legend, mind—and would not have you think that I believe it myself. So this Rosencrucx, finding that his cloistral existence was inconvenient for the prosecution of his studies, travelled into the East, and spent many years in acquiring the knowledge handed down to the wise men of those climes by the ancient Magi and Chaldeans. He visited Egypt and learnt many wonderful secrets by studying the hieroglyphics on the Egyptian pyramids. I forget how long he remained in the East; but it is said that he visited every place of interest in the Holy Land, and received heavenly inspirations on the spot where our Saviour was crucified. On his return to Europe, he saw full well that if he revealed all his knowledge at once, he would be put to death by the Inquisition as a wizard, and the world would lose the benefit of all the learning he had acquired. So says the legend; and it goes on to recite that Christianus Rosencrucx then founded the Order of the Rosy Cross, which is nothing more or less than a brotherhood of wise men whom he initiated in all his secrets, with the intention that they should reveal from time to time small portions thereof, and thus give to the world by very slow degrees that immense amount of knowledge which, he supposed, would have stupefied and astounded everybody if made public suddenly and all at once.”

“Strange—most strange,” thought Wagner within himself, “that I should never have gleaned all these details before, eager as my inquiries and researches in the pursuit of knowledge have been! But heaven has willed everything for the best; and it is doubtless intended that my salvation shall proceed from the very quarter that was least known to me, and concerning which I have ever manifested the most contemptuous indifference, in the sphere of knowledge!”

“You appear to be much interested, signor,” said the barber, “in this same tale of Christianus Rosencrucx. But there is too much intelligence depicted on your countenance to allow me to suppose that you will place any reliance on the absurd story. How is it possible, signor, that an Order could have existed for so many years without any one member ever having betrayed the secrets which bind them all together? Moreover, their place of abode and study is totally unknown to the world; and if they inhabited the deepest cavern under the earth, accident must sooner or later have led to its discovery. Believe me, signor, 'tis naught save a ridiculous legend; and, though a poor ignorant man myself, I hope I have too much good sense and too much respect for my father confessor, to suppose for a minute that there is on earth any set of men more learned than the holy ministers of the Church.”

“How long ago is Christianus Rosencrucx reported to have lived?” demanded Wagner, suddenly interrupting the garrulous and narrow-minded Sicilian.

“There were again?” he ejaculated. “The credulous declare that Rosencrucx discovered in the East the means of prolonging existence, and though he was born as far back as the year 1350, he is still alive.”

Had not the barber turned aside at that precise instant to fill an ewer and place a towel for his customer's use, he would have been surprised by the sudden start and the expression of ineffable joy which denoted Fernand's emotions, as by a rapid calculation mentally made, our

hero perceived that if Rosencrux were born in 1359, and were alive at that moment—namely in 1521—his age would be exactly one hundred and sixty-two!

"It is Christian Rosencrux, then," he said to himself, "whom I have inquired for—whom I am to see—and who will dissolve the spell that has been placed upon me! But where shall I seek him?—whither can I go to find his secret abode?"

The duties of the barber were completed; and Wagner threw down a piece of gold, saying, "Keep that coin, friend; for your discourse has greatly interested me—and has indeed well deserved it."

The poor old man had never possessed in all his life so much money at one time; and so vast was his joy, that he could only mutter a few broken sentences to express his gratitude.

"I require not thanks, my good friend," said Wagner. "But, one word ere I depart. Knowest thou the spot which rumour indicates as the abode of that sect of whom we have been speaking?"

"Nay, excellent signor," replied the barber; "there your question masters me; for in this case rumour goes not to such a length as to afford hints for an investigation which would prove its utter fallacy. All that I have ever heard, signor, concerning the Rosicrucians, you have learnt from my lips; and I know no more."

Wagner, finding that further inquiry in the quarter was useless, took leave of the old man, and, traversing the suburb, entered the town of Syracuse.

## CHAPTER LXV.

### THE ROSICRUCIANS.

FERNAND was now at a loss how to act. He felt convinced that it was useless to institute any further inquiry relative to the whereabouts of the secret Order of the Rosy Cross: because, had popular rumour ever hinted at any clue in that respect, the garrulous and inquisitive barber would have been sure to hear of it.

He was not, however, disheartened. No; very far from that;—for he was confident that the same supernal power which had hitherto directed him, and which was rapidly clearing away all obstacles in his path towards perfect emancipation from the influence of the Evil One, would carry him on to a successful and triumphant issue.

Throwing himself, therefore, entirely on the wisdom and mercy of heaven, he roamed about the town of Syracuse, without any settled object in view, until he was much wearied and it was very late. He then entered a miserable hostel, or inn—the best, however, that he could discover; and there, having partaken of some refreshment, he retired to the chamber allotted to him.

Sleep soon visited his eyes: but he had not long enjoyed the sweets of slumber, when that balmy repose was interrupted either by a touch or sound, he knew not which.

Starting up in his couch, he perceived a tall figure, muffled in a huge dark mantle, and wearing a slouched broad-brimmed hat, standing by the side of the bed.

"Rise, Fernand Wagner," said a mild but masculine voice; "and follow me. He whom thou seekest hath sent me to lead me to him."

Wagner did not hesitate to obey this mandate, which, he felt certain, was connected with the important business that had borne him to Syracuse. His apparel was speedily assumed; and he said, "I am ready to follow thee, stranger, whoever thou art, and whithersoever thou mayst lead; for my faith is in heaven."

"Those who have faith, shall prosper," observed the stranger, in a solemn tone.

He then led the way noiselessly down the steep staircase of the inn, and issued forth by the front gate, closely followed by Wagner.

In deep silence did they proceed through the dark, narrow, and tortuous streets,—leaving at length the town behind them,—and then entering upon a barren and uneven waste.

By degrees an object, at first dimly seen in the distance and by the uncertain moonlight which was constantly struggling with the dark clouds of a somewhat tempestuous night assumed a more defined appearance,—until a mass of gigantic ruins at length stood out from the sombre obscurity. In a few moments the moon shone forth purely and brightly; and its beams falling on decayed buttresses, broken Gothic arches, deep entrance ways, remnants of pinnacles and spires, the rich sculptures of a mighty oriel, and the massive

walls of ruined towers, gave a wildly romantic and yet not unpicturesque aspect to the remains of what was evidently once a vast monastic institution.

The muffled stranger led the way amongst the ruins, and at last stopped at a gate opening into a small square enclosure formed by strong iron railings, seven feet high and shaped at the points like javelins.

Passing through the gateway, the guide conducted Wagner into a cemetery, which was filled with the marble tombs of the mitred abbots who had once held sway over the monastery and the broad lands attached to it.

"You behold around you," said the muffled stranger, waving his arm towards the ruins, "all that remains of a sanctuary once the most celebrated in Sicily for the piety and wisdom of its inmates. But a horrible crime,—a murder perpetrated under circumstances unusually diabolical, the criminal being no less a person than the last Lord Abbot himself, and the victim a beautiful girl whom he had seduced,—rendered this institution accursed in the eyes of God and man. The monks abandoned it; and the waste over which you have passed, is the now unclaimed but once fertile estate belonging to the abbey. The superstition of the Sicilians has not failed to invent terrific tales in connection with these ruins; and the belief that each night at twelve o'clock the soul of the guilty abbot is driven by the scourge of demons through the scene alike of his episcopal power and his black turpitude, effectually prevents impertinent or inconvenient intrusion."

The observation, with which the muffled stranger concluded his brief narrative, convinced Wagner that it was amongst those ruins the brethren of the Rosy Cross had fixed their secret abode.

But he had no time for reflection;—inasmuch as his guide hurried him on amidst the tombs on which the light of the silver moon now streamed with a power and an effect that no dark cloud could for the time have impaired.

Stopping at the base of one of the most splendid monuments in that cemetery, the muffled stranger touched some secret spring, and a large marble block immediately opened like a door, the aperture revealing a narrow flight of stone steps.

Wagner was directed to descend first—a command which he obeyed without hesitation, his guide closing the marble entrance ere he followed.

For several minutes the two descended in total darkness.

At length, a faint glimmering light met Wagner's view;—and as he proceeded, it grew stronger and stronger—until it became of such dazzling brilliancy that his eyes ached with the supernal splendour.

That glorious lustre was diffused from a silver lamp hanging to the arched roof of a long passage or corridor of masonry, to which the stone steps led.

"Fernand Wagner," said the guide, in his mild and somewhat monotonous voice, "then now beholdest the Eternal Lamp of the Rosicrucians. For a hundred and twenty years has that lamp burnt with as powerful a lustre as that which it now sheds forth; and never once—no, not once during that period, has it been replenished. No human hand has touched it since the day when it was first suspended there by the great founder of our sect."

All doubt was now dispelled from the mind of Wagner—if doubt he had even for a moment entertained since the muffled stranger had summoned him from the inn: he was indeed in the secret abode of the holy sect of the Rosy Cross—his guide, too, was a member of that brotherhood—and there, almost too dazzling to gaze upon, burnt the Eternal Lamp, which was the symbol of the knowledge cherished by the Order!

Wagner turned to gaze in wonder and admiration upon his guide; and beneath the broad brim of the slouched hat he beheld a countenance venerable with years—imposing with intelligence—and benevolent with every human charity.

"Wise and philanthropic Rosicrucian!" exclaimed Wagner; "I offer thee my deepest gratitude for having permitted my feet to enter this sanctuary. But how earnest thou to learn that I sought admittance hither? and wherefore hast thou so far trusted me as to unveil to my eyes the mysteries of this place?"

"We are the servants of holy angels who reveal to us in visions the will of the Most High!" answered the Rosicrucian; "and they who commanded me to bring thee hither, will induce thy heart to retain our secret inviolable."

"Not for worlds," cried Wagner, with an enthusiasm which denoted his sincerity, "would I betray ye!"

"Tis well," said the Rosicrucian with philosophic calmness—as if he put more faith in the protecting influence of heaven than in the promises of man. "I shall not accompany thee farther. Follow that passage: at the extremity there are two corridors branching off in different directions; but thou wilt pursue the one leading to the right. Proceed fearlessly, and stop not until thou shalt stand in the presence of the great founder of our sect."

Fernand hastened to obey these directions; and having

long, and white as snow: a century and three score years had not dimmed the lustre of his eyes; and his form, though somewhat bent, was muscular and well-knit.

He was seated at a table covered with an infinite variety of scientific apparatus; and articles of the same nature were strewed upon the ground. To the roof hung an iron lamp, which indeed burnt faintly after the brilliant lustre of the eternal flame that Wagner had seen in the passage; but its flickering gleam shone lurid and ominous on a blood-red cross suspended to the wall.

Fernand drew near the table, and bowed reverentially

"A QUIET, DREAMY REPOSE INSENSIBLY STOLE OVER HIM." (See p. 110.)

threaded the two passages, he entered a large and rudely-hollowed cavern, where the feelings of mingled awe and suspense with which he had approached it, were immediately changed into deep veneration and wonder as he suddenly found himself in the presence of one who, by his appearance, he knew could be none other than Christianus Rosencrux!

Never had Fernand beheld a being of such venerable aspect; and, though old—evidently very old, as indeed Wagner knew him to be,—yet the founder of the celebrated Rosicrucians manifested every appearance of possessing a vigorous constitution, as he was assuredly endowed with a magnificent intellect. His beard was

to the Rosicrucian chief, who acknowledged his salutation with a benignant smile.

"Wagner," he said, in a firm but mild tone, "I have been forewarned of thy coming, and am prepared to receive thee. Thy constant and unvarying faith in heaven has opened to thee the gates of salvation, and it is mine to direct thee how to act, that the dreadful doom which thou hast drawn upon thyself may be annihilated soon and for ever."

The venerable man paused, and Fernand again bowed lowly with profound respect.

"So soon as the morning's sun shall have revisited this hemisphere," continued Rosencrux, "thou must depart



for Italy. Start not, Fernand—but prepare to obey that power which will sustain thee. On arriving in Italy, proceed direct to Florence; and fear not to enter that city even in the broad daylight. Thou wilt not be harmed! There await the current of those circumstances that must lead to the one grand event which is ordained to break the spell that has cast upon thee the doom of a Wehr-Wolf. For as thou didst voluntarily unite thyself in the face of heaven with Donna Nisida of Riverola, so it is decreed, for the wisest purposes, that a circumstance intimately connected with her destiny must become a charm and talisman to change *thine own*. On thine arrival in Florence, therefore, seek not to avoid the Lady Nisida;—but rather hasten at once to her presence—and, again I say, a supernal power will protect thee from any baneful influence which she might still exercise over thee! For the spell that the Evil One hath cast upon thee, Fernand Wagner, shall be broken only on that day and in that hour when *thine eyes shall behold the bleached skeletons of two innocent victims suspended to the same beam!*”

Having uttered these words in a louder and more hurried, but not the less impressive tone, than he had at first used, Christianus Rosencrux motioned impatiently for Wagner to depart.

And Fernand, amazed and horrified at the dreadful words which had met his ears, retreated from the cavern, and sped rapidly back to the spot where he had quitted his guide, whom he found waiting his return beneath the undying lamp.

The Rosicrucian conducted Wagner in silence from that deep and mysterious subterranean beneath the tomb: thence through the cemetery—amidst the ruins of the monastery—and across the wild waste, back to Syracuse;—nor did the muffled brother of the Rosy Cross take leave of Fernand until they reached the door of the hostel.

There they parted—the Rosicrucian invoking a blessing upon the head of Wagner, who regained his chamber without disturbing the other inmates of the house,—but with the conflicting emotions of ardent hopes and appalling fears, vague doubts, and holy aspirations filling his breast.

By degrees, however—as he was enabled to reason to himself with increasing calmness—the fears and the doubts became fainter and fainter, while the hopes and the aspirations grew stronger and stronger: and at length, throwing himself upon his knees, he exclaimed fervently, “O Lord, deal with me as thou wilt: thy will be done!”

## \* CHAPTER LXVI.

### NISIDA AT HOME AGAIN.

It was late in the afternoon of a sultry day, towards the close of September,—or, to be more particular, on the 25th of this month,—that a numerous and brilliant cavalcade, on emerging from a grove which bounded one of the sinuosities of the Arno, came within sight of the towers and pinnacles of Florence.

On the white felt turbans of a hundred and fifty Ottoman soldiers glistened the crescent—the symbol of Islamism; and their steel-sheathed scimitars and the trappings of their horses sent forth a martial din as they were agitated by the rapidity of the march.

Forty-eight slaves, also mounted on steeds procured at Leghorn, followed the soldiers with a short interval between the two corps; and in the space thus left, rode the Greek Demetrius and the Lady Nisida of Riverola.

The latter wore the garb of her sex, and sat upon her horse with the grace and dignity of an Amazonian Queen.

The moment the cavalcade came in sight of the fair City of Flowers, a flush of joy and triumph suddenly diffused itself over Nisida's countenance; and her lips were simultaneously compressed to prevent the utterance of that exclamation of gladness which her heart sent up to her tongue.

Demetrius now commanded a temporary halt: and, addressing himself to a Turkish youth who had been attached to his person in the capacity of secretary, he said, “Yakoub, bid thou in advance, with an escort of two soldiers and two slaves, and push on to Florence, there seek an immediate interview with the President of the Council of State, and acquaint that high functionary with the tidings of my approach. Thou wilt inform him that I am about to enter Florence in the peaceful capacity of Envoy from the puissant and most glorious

Ibrahim-Pacha, the Vizier of the Sultan, to treat on divers matters interesting to the honour of the Ottoman Porte and the welfare of all Italy. In the meantime, I shall so check our speed that we may not reach the city until after sunset, which arrangement will afford you two full hours to accomplish the mission which I now entrust to thee.”

Yakoub bowed, and hastened to obey the commands which he had received,—speeding towards Florence, attended by two soldiers and two slaves.

Demetrius then ordered his party to dismount and rest for a short space upon the banks of the Arno. Some of his slaves immediately pitched a tent, into which he conducted Nisida; and refreshments were served to them.

When the rest was concluded, and they were left alone together for a few minutes, Nisida's manner suddenly changed from calm patrician reserve to a strange agitation,—her lips quivered—her eyes flashed fire;—and then, as if desperately resolved to put into execution the idea which she had formed, she seized Demetrius by the hand, bent her head towards him, and murmured in the faintest whisper possible, “Start not to hear the sound of my voice! I am neither deaf nor dumb. But this is not the place for explanations. I have much to tell you—much to hear—for I can speak to thee of Calanthe, and prove that he whom thou servest so zealously is a wretch meriting only thy vengeance.”

“My God! my God!—what marvels are now taking place!” murmured the Greek, surveying Nisida in astonishment and alarm.

“Silence—silence, I implore you!” continued she, in the same rapid, low, and yet distinctly audible whisper: “for your sake—for mine, betray me not! Deaf and dumb must I appear—deaf and dumb must I yet be deemed for a short space. But to-night—at twelve o'clock—you will meet me, Demetrius, in the garden of the Riverola mansion; and then I will conduct you to an apartment where we may confer without fear of being overheard—without danger of interruption.”

“I will not fail thee, lady,” said the Greek, scarcely able to recover from the amazement into which Nisida's sudden revelation of her power of speech and hearing had thrown him: then, as an opportunity seized upon his soul, he demanded, “But, Calanthe's lady—in the name of heaven! one word more—let that word give me hope that I may see my sister again!”

“Demetrius,” answered Nisida, her countenance becoming ominous and sombre, “you will never behold her more. The lust of Ibrahim-Pacha—may, start not violently—brought destruction and death upon Calanthe!”

The features of the young Greek were at first distorted with anguish, and tears started from his eyes: but, in the next moment, their expression changed to one denoting fierce rage and a determination to be avenged.

Nisida understood all that was passing in his soul; and she bent upon him a significant glance, which said more eloquently than language could have done—“Yes; vengeance thou shalt have!”

She then rose from the velvet cushions which had been spread upon the ground within the tent, and waving her hand in token of temporary farewell to Demetrius, hastened forth—mounted her horse—and departed, alone and unattended, towards Florence.

Great was the surprise that evening of the numerous servants and dependants at the Riverola mansion, when Donna Nisida suddenly reappeared, after an absence of nearly seven months—and that absence so unaccountable to them! Although her haughty and imperious manner had never been particularly calculated to render her beloved by the menials of the household,—yet her supposed affliction of deafness and dumbness had naturally made her an object of interest; and, moreover, as close upon three months had elapsed since Count Francisco himself had disappeared in a strange and alarming way, two days only after his return from the wars, the domestics were pleased to behold at least one member of the lost family come back amongst them.

Thus it was with sincere demonstrations of delight that the dependants and menials welcomed Donna Nisida of Riverola; and she was not ungracious enough to receive their civilities with coldness.

But she speedily escaped from the ceremonies of this reception; and, intimating by signs to the female minions who were about to escort her to her own apartments, that she was anxious to be alone, she hurried thither, her heart leaping with joy at the thought of



smiled with haughty triumph, as if in defiance to her foes.

She then repaired to one of the splendid saloons of the mansions; and ere she sat down to the repast that was served up, she despatched a note acquainting Dr. Duras with her return, and requesting his immediate presence.

In about half an hour the physician arrived; and his joy at beholding Nisida again was only equalled by his impatience to learn the cause of her long absence, and all that had befallen her during the interval.

She made a sign for the old man to follow her to the retirement of her own apartments; and then, having carefully closed the doors, she said to him in a low tone, "Doctor, we will converse by means of signs no more; for, though still forced to simulate the Deaf and Dumb in the presence of the world, yet now—with you, who have all along known my terrible secret—our discourse must be too important to be carried on by mere signs."

"Nisida," returned Duras, also in a low and cautious tone, "thou knowest that I love thee as if thou wast my own daughter; and thy voice sounds like music upon my ears. But when will the dreadful necessity which renders thee dumb before the world—when will it cease, Nisida?"

"Soon—soon, doctor—if thou wilt aid me," answered the lady.

A long and earnest conversation then ensued—it is not necessary to give the details to the reader, inasmuch as their nature will soon transpire. Suffice it to say that Nisida urged a particular request, which she backed by such explanations, and we must also say *misrepresentations*, as she thought suitable to her purpose; and that Dr. Duras eventually, though not without much compunction and hesitation, at length acceded to her prayer.

She then gave him a brief account of her abduction from Florence by the villain Stephano—her long residence on the Island of Snakes—and her deliverance from thence by the Ottoman fleet, which was now moored off the coast of Leghorn. But she said nothing of Fernand Wagner; nor did she inform the physician that she was acquainted with the cause of Francisco's disappearance and the place where he was detained.

At length Dr. Duras took his leave; but ere he left the room, Nisida caught him by the hand, saying in a low yet impressive tone, "Remember your solemn promise, my dear friend, and induce my brother to leave Flora Francatelli to her fate."

"I will—I will," answered the physician. "And, after all you have told me, and if she be really the bad, profligate, and evil-disposed girl you represent her, it will be well that the Inquisition should hold her tight in its grasp."

With these words Dr. Duras departed, leaving Nisida to gloat over the success which her plans had thus far experienced.

## CHAPTER LXVII.

### NISIDA AND DEMETRIUS.

It was verging towards midnight, and the moon was concealed behind dark clouds, when a tall figure, muffled in a cloak, climbed over the iron railings which enclosed one portion of the spacious gardens attached to the Riverola palace.

This person was Fernand Wagner.

He had arrived in Florence two days before that on which Nisida returned once more to the ancestral dwelling—he had entered the city boldly and openly by the joyous sunlight—and yet no one molested him. He even encountered some of the very *sbirri* who had arrested him in the preceding month of February: they saluted him respectfully, thus showing that they recognised him—but offered not to harm him. His trial, his condemnation, and his escape appeared all to have been forgotten. He repaired to his own mansion: his servants, who had remained in possession of the dwelling, received him with demonstrations of joy and welcome, as if he had just returned, under ordinary circumstances, from a long journey. Truly, then, he was blessed by the protection of heaven! And—more wondrous still—on entering his favourite room, he beheld all his pictures in their proper places, as if none of them had ever been removed—as if the confiscation of several by the criminal tribunal had never taken place. Over the one which had proclaimed the secret of his doom to the Judges and the audience on the occasion of his trial, still hung the black cloth; and an indefinable curiosity—no, not a sentiment of curiosity, but one of hope—impelled him to remove the covering. And how exquisite was his joy—how great his amaze-

ment—how sincere his thanksgivings, when he beheld but a blank piece of canvas! The horrible picture of the Wehr-Wolf—a picture which he had painted when in a strangely morbid state of mind—had disappeared! Here was another sign of heaven's goodness—a farther proof of celestial mercy!

On instituting inquiries, Fernand had learnt that Donna Nisida had not yet come back to Florence; but he employed trusty persons to watch and give him notice of her arrival, the instant it should occur. Thus Nisida had not been half an hour at the Riverola mansion when Fernand was made acquainted with her return.

From the conversation which had taken place between them at various times on the island, and as the reader is well aware, Wagner felt convinced that Nisida would again simulate deafness and dumbness; and was therefore desirous to avoid giving her any surprise, by appearing abruptly before her—a proceeding which might evoke a sudden ejaculation, and thus betray her secret. Moreover, he knew not whether circumstances would render his visits, made in a public manner, agreeable to her;—and perhaps—pardon him, gentle reader!—perhaps he was also curious to learn whether she still thought of him, or whether the excitement of her return had absorbed all tender feelings of that nature.

Influenced by these various motives, Wagner muffled himself in a long Tuscan cloak, and repaired to the vicinity of the Riverola mansion. He passed through the gardens without encountering any one; and, perceiving a side door open, he entered the building. Ascending the stairs, he thought that he should be acting in accordance with the advice given him by Rosencrux and also consistently with prudence, were he at once to seek an interview with Nisida privately. He therefore repaired in the direction of the principal saloons of the palace; but, losing his way amidst the maze of corridors, he was about to retire, when he beheld the object of his search—the beautiful Nisida—enter a room with a lamp in her hand. He now felt convinced that he should meet her alone; and he hurried after her. In pursuance of his cautious plan, he opened the door gently, and was already in the middle of the apartment, when he perceived Nisida standing by the side of a bed, and with her head fixed in that immovable manner which indicates intent gazing upon some object. Instantly supposing that some invalid reposed in that couch, and now seized with a dreadful alarm lest Nisida, on beholding him, should utter a sudden ejaculation which would betray the secret of her feigned dumbness, Fernand considerably retreated with all possible speed; nor was he aware that Nisida had observed him—much less that his appearance there had excited such fears in her breast, those fears being greatly enhanced by his negligence in leaving the door open behind him.

Oh! had Nisida known it was thou, Fernand Wagner—how joyous—how happy she would have been;—for the conviction that she bore within her bosom the pledge of your mutual loves, had made her heart yearn that eve to meet with thee again.

And was it a like attraction on thy part—or the mysterious influence that now guided all thy movements, which induced thee, at midnight, to enter the Riverola gardens again, that thou mightest be as it were upon the same spot where she dwelt, and scent the fragrance of the same flowers that perfumed the atmosphere which she breathed? Oh! doubtless it was that mysterious influence;—thou hadst now that power within thee which made thee strong to resist all the blandishments of the syren, and to prefer the welfare of thine own soul to aught in this world beside!

We said, then—at the commencement of this chapter—that Fernand entered the Riverola gardens shortly before midnight.

But scarcely had he crossed the iron railings and turned into the nearest path formed by shrubs and evergreens, when he was startled by hearing another person enter the grounds in the same unceremonious manner. Fernand accordingly stood aside, in the deep shade of the trees; and in a few moments a figure, muffled like himself in a cloak, passed rapidly by.

Wagner was debating within himself what course he should pursue—for he feared that some treachery was intended towards Nisida—when, to his boundless surprise, he heard the mysterious visitant say in a low tone, "Is it you, lady?—to which query the unmistakable and never-to-be-forgotten voice of his Nisida answered, "Tis I, Demetrius. Follow me noiselessly—and breathe not another word for the present!"

Fernand was shocked and grieved at what he had just heard, and which savoured so strongly of an intrigue. Had not his ears deceived him? Was this the Nisida from whom he had parted but little more than three weeks back, and who had left him that tender note which he had found in the hut on the island?

But he had no time for reflection!—the pair were moving rapidly towards the mansion—and Wagner unhesitatingly followed, his footsteps being soundless on the damp soil of the borders of flowers, and his form being concealed by the shade of the tall evergreens which he skirted.

He watched Nisida and her companion until they disappeared by a small private door at the back of the mansion; and this door was by them incautiously left unlocked, though shut close. It opened readily to Wagner's hand, and he found himself at the foot of a dark staircase, the sound of ascending steps on which met his ears. Up that narrow flight he sped, noiselessly but hastily; and in a few moments he was stopped by another door which had just closed behind those whom he was following.

Here he was compelled to pause, in the hope that the partition might not be so thick as completely to intercept the sound of their voices in the chamber: but, after listening with breathless attention for a few minutes, he could not catch even the murmuring of a whisper. It now struck him that Nisida and her companion might have passed on into a room more remote than the one to which that door had admitted them; and he resolved to follow on. Accordingly, he opened the door with such successful precaution that not a sound—not even a creaking of the hinge, was the result: and he immediately perceived that there was a thick curtain within; for it will be recollected that this door was behind the drapery of Nisida's bed. At the same time a light, somewhat subdued by the thick curtain, appeared; and the sounds of voices met Fernand's ears.

"Signor," said the melodious voice of Nisida, in its sweetest, softest tones, "it is due to myself to tender fitting excuse for introducing you thus into my private chamber; but the necessity of discoursing together without fear of interruption and in some place that is secure from the impertinence of eaves-droppers, must serve as an apology."

"Lady," replied Demetrius, "it needed no explanation of your motive in bringing me hither to command on my part that respect which is due to you."

A weight was removed from Wagner's mind—it was assuredly no tender sentiment that had brought Nisida and the Greek together this night; and the curiosity of Fernand was therefore excited all the more strongly.

"We will not waste time in unnecessary parlance," resumed Nisida, after a short pause; "nor must you seek to learn the causes—the powerful causes, which have urged me to impose upon myself the awful sacrifice involved in the simulation of loss of speech and hearing. Suffice it for you to know that, when on board the Kapitan-Pasha's ship, I overheard every syllable of the conversation which one day took place between the apostate Ibrahim and yourself—a conversation wherein you gave a detailed account of all your proceedings at Florence, and in the course of which you spoke feelingly of your sister Calanthe."

"Alas! poor Calanthe!" exclaimed Demetrius, in a mournful tone: "and she really no more?"

"Listen to me while I relate the manner in which I became aware of her fate," said Nisida.

She then explained the treacherous visit of the Grand Vizier to the cabin wherein she had slept on board the Ottoman Admiral's ship—the way in which the Ethiopian slave had interfered to save her—and the conversation that had taken place between Ibrahim and the negro, revealing the dread fate of Calanthe.

"Is it possible that I have served so faithfully a man possessed of such a demon-heart!" cried Demetrius. "But I will have vengeance, lady—I will have vengeance:—yes—the murdered Calanthe shall be avenged!"

"And I too must have vengeance upon the proud and insolent Vizier who sought to violate all the laws of hospitality in respect to me," observed Nisida, "and who seeks to marry his sister, the low-born Flora—the sister of the base renegade—to the illustrious scion of the noble house of Riverola! Vengeance, too, must I have upon the wretch Antonio—the base pander to my father's illicit and degrading amours—the miscreant who sought to plunder this mansion, and who even dared to utter threats against me in that conversation with his accomplice Ventura, which you, signor, overheard in the

streets of Florence. This same wretch it is, too, who consigned my brother to the custody of banditti;—and though, for certain reasons, I deplore not that captivity which Francisco has endured, inasmuch as it has effectually prevented him from interesting himself on behalf of Flora Fracatelli,—yet as Antonio was animated by vengeance only in so using my brother, he shall pay the penalty due on account of all his crimes."

"And in the task of punishing Antonio, lady," said Demetrius, "shall I be right glad to aid—for did not the villain deceive me infamously in respect to the despatches which I sought to forward to Constantinople when last I was at Florence? and, not contented with that vile treachery, he even plotted with his accomplice Ventura against my life."

"Vengeance, then, upon our enemies, Demetrius!" exclaimed Nisida. "And this is how our aims shall be accomplished," she continued, in a lower and less excited tone:—"The ambitious views of Ibrahim-Pasha must experience a signal defeat; and, as he is too powerful to be personally injured by us, we must torture his soul by crushing his relations—we must punish him through the medium of his sister and his aunt. This evening I had a long discourse with Dr. Duras, who is devoted to my interests, and over whom I wield a wondrous power of persuasion. He has undertaken to induce his brother, Angelo Duras, to abandon the cause of the Fracatellis; and the Inquisition will therefore deal with them as it lists. Father Marco I can also manage as I will: he understands the language in which the deaf and dumb converse, for he has so long been confessor to our family. To-morrow I will undertake to send him to Rome on some charitable mission connected with the Church. Thus the only persons whom you secured, when last you were in Florence, in the interests of the Fracatellis, will cease to watch over them; and as they are accused of being accomplices in the sacrifice perpetrated in the Carmelite Convent, naught will save them from the flames of the auto-da-fé."

"Oh! spirit of the murdered Calanthe," exclaimed Demetrius, with savage joy, "thou wilt be avenged yet! And thou, false Vizier, shalt writhe in the anguish of bitter feelings while thy relatives writhe in the flames at the stake!"

"Now, as for Antonio, and the rest of the banditti who stormed the convent and gave freedom to the hated Flora—who have likewise captured my brother—and who have so long been a terror to Florence," continued Nisida, "we must annihilate them all at a blow: not a soul of the gang must be spared!"

Nisida knew full well that at least some of the banditti were acquainted with the fact that she was the murderess of Agnes, and that they could also tell an awkward tale of how she sought to bribe them to rescue Fernand Wagner in case of an adverse judgment on the part of the criminal tribunal. The total annihilation of the horde was consequently the large aim at which she aspired; and her energetic mind shrank not from any difficulties that might appear in the way towards the execution of that object.

"The design is grand, but not without its obstacles," observed Demetrius. "Your ladyship will moreover adopt measures to rescue the Lord Count of Riverola first."

"By means of gold everything can be accomplished amongst villains," returned Nisida; "and the necessary preliminaries to the carrying out of our project lie with you, signor. To-morrow morning must you seek Antonio. He knows not that you suspect his villany; and, as you will say nothing relative to the failure in the arrival of your despatches at Constantinople, he will rest secure in the belief that you have not yet discovered that deed of treachery. You must represent yourself as the mortal enemy of the Count of Riverola, and so speak as to lead Antonio to confess to you where he is, and offer to become the instrument of your vengeance. Then bribe Antonio heavily to deliver up Francisco into your power to-morrow night at a particular hour, and at a place not far from the spot where you know the secret entrance of the banditti's stronghold to be."

"All this, lady," said Demetrius, "can be easily arranged. Antonio would barter his soul for gold;—much more readily, then, will he sell the Count of Riverola to one who bids high for the possession of the noble prisoner."

"But this is not all," resumed Nisida: "'tis merely the preface to my plan. So soon as the shades of to-morrow's evening shall have involved the earth in obscurity, a strong party of your soldiers, properly dis-

guised, but well armed, must repair, in small sections, or even singly, to that grove where you have already obtained a clue to the entrance of the robbers' stronghold. Let them conceal themselves amidst the trees in the immediate vicinity of the enormous chestnut that overhangs the precipice. When the robbers emerge from their lurking-place with Francisco, your soldiers will immediately seize upon them. Should you then discover the secret of the entrance to the stronghold, the object will be gained,—your men will penetrate into the subterranean den,—and the massacre of the horde will prove an easy matter. But should it occur that those banditti who may be employed in leading forth my brother do shut up the entrance of their den so speedily that your dependants discover not its secret, then must we trust to bribery or threats to wrest that secret from the miscreants. At all events Antonio will be present to accompany Francisco to the place which you will appoint to meet them; and as the villain will fall into your power, it will perhaps prove less difficult to induce him to betray his comrades, than it might be to persuade any of the banditti themselves."

"Lady, your plan has every element of success," observed Demetrius; "and all shall be done as you suggest. Indeed, I will myself conduct the expedition. But should you thus at once effect the release of Don Francisco, will he not oppose your designs relative to the condemnation of Flora Fracatelli by the Inquisition?"

"Dr. Duras is well acquainted with the precise position of that process," answered Nisida; "and from him I learnt that the third examination of the prisoners will take place to-morrow, when judgment will be pronounced should no advocate appear to urge a feasible cause of delay."

"The arrests took place on the 3rd of July," said Demetrius; "and Angelo Duras undertook to obtain the postponement of the final hearing for three months. To-morrow, lady, is but the 26th of September."

"True," responded Nisida; "but were a delay granted, it would be for eight days,—and thus you perceive how nicely Angelo Duras had weighed all the intricacies of the case, and how accurately he had calculated the length of the term to be gained by the exercise of all the subtleties of the Inquisitorial law. Therefore, as no advocate will appear to demand the delay, Flora is certain to be condemned to-morrow night, and the release of Francisco may take place simultaneously;—for when once the Grand Inquisitor shall have pronounced the extreme sentence, no human power can reverse it. And now," added Nisida, "but one word more. The Grand Vizier commanded you to despatch a courier daily to Leghorn with full particulars of all your proceedings: see that those accounts be of a nature to lull the treacherous Ibrahim into security; for, were he to learn that his aunt and sister are in dread peril, he would be capable of marching at the head of all his troops to sack the city of Florence."

"Fear not on that subject, lady," answered Demetrius. "I will so amuse the demon-hearted Grand Vizier by my despatches, that he shall become excited with joyous hopes,—so that the blow,—the dread blow which we are preparing for him—may be the more terribly severe!"

The Greek then rose to take his leave of Donna Nisida: and Wagner, having closed the secret door as noiselessly as he had opened it, hurried away from the Riverola mansion, bewildered and grieved at all he had heard—for he could now no longer conceal from himself that a very fiend was incarnate in the shape of her whom he had loved so madly!

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Having tossed on a feverish couch for upwards of an hour,—unable to banish from his mind the cold-blooded plot which Nisida and Demetrius had resolved upon in order to consign Flora Fracatelli and her equally innocent aunt to the stake,—Wagner at last slept through sheer exhaustion.

Then Christian Rosenkrux appeared to him in a dream, and addressed him in the following manner:—"Heaven hath chosen thee as the instrument to defeat the iniquitous purposes of Nisida of Riverola in respect of two guiltless and deserving women. Angelo Duras is an upright man; but he is deluded and misled by the representations made to him by Nisida, through his brother the physician, relative to the true character of Flora. In the evening, at nine o'clock, hie thou to Angelo Duras—command him, in the name of justice and humanity, to do his duty towards his clients—and he will obey thee. Then, having performed this much,

speed thou without delay to Leghorn, and seek the Grand Vizier, Ibrahim-Pacha. To him shalt thou merely state that Demetrius is a traitor, and that tremendous perils hang over the heads of the Vizier's much-loved relatives. Manifest no hatred to the Vizier on account of his late treacherous intention with regard to the honour of Nisida: for vengeance belongeth not to mortals. And in these measures only, of all the deeply ramified plots and designs which thou didst hear discussed between Nisida and Demetrius, shalt thou interfere. Leave the rest to heaven!"

The founder of the Rosicrucians disappeared; and when Fernand awoke late in the day—for his slumber had been long and deep—he remembered the vision which he had seen, and resolved to obey the orders he had received.

## CHAPTER LXVIII. THE INQUISITION.

BENEATH the massive and heavy tower of the Palazzo del Podesta, or Ducal Palace of Florence, was the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition.

Small, low, and terribly sombre in appearance was this court,—with walls of the most solid masonry, an arched roof, and a pavement formed of vast blocks of dark-veined marble.

Thither the light of heaven never penetrated;—for it was situate far below the level of the earth, and at the very foundations of that tower which rose, frowning and sullen, high above.

Iron lamps diffused a lurid lustre around, rendering ghastly the countenances alike of the oppressors and the oppressed; and when it was deemed necessary to invest the proceedings with a more awe-inspiring solemnity than usual, torches, borne by the Familiars, or officers, of the Inquisition, were substituted for those iron lamps.

Over the judgment-seat was suspended a large crucifix.

On one side of the court were three doors,—one communicating with the corridor and flight of stone steps leading to and from the tribunal; the second affording admission into the Torture-chamber; and the third opening to the prisons of the Inquisition.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening, on the 26th of September, that Flora Fracatelli and her aunt were placed before the Grand Inquisitor to be examined for the second time.

When the Familiars, habited in their long black ecclesiastical dresses with the strange cowls or hoods shading their stern and remorseless countenances, led in the two females from the separate cells in which they had been confined, the first and natural impulse of the unhappy creatures was to rush into each other's arms:—but they were immediately torn rudely asunder, and so stationed in the presence of the Grand Inquisitor as to have a considerable interval between them.

But the glances which the aunt and niece exchanged, gave encouragement and hope to each other;—and the sentiments which prompted those glances were really cherished by the persecuted females; inasmuch as Father Marco, who had been permitted to visit them occasionally, had dropped sundry hints of coming aid, and powerful though at present invisible protection,—thereby cheering their hearts to some little extent, and mitigating the intensity of their apprehensions.

Flora was very pale;—but never, perhaps, had she appeared more beautiful,—for her large blue eyes expressed the most melting softness, and her dark brown hair hung dishevelled over her shoulders, while her bosom heaved with the agitation of suspense.

"Women," said the Grand Inquisitor, glancing first to the aunt and then to the niece, his eyes however lingering longer upon the latter, "know ye of what ye are accused? Let the younger speak first."

"My lord," answered Flora, in a firmer tone than might have been expected from the feelings indicated by her outward appearance, "when on a former occasion I stood in the presence of your Eminence, I expressed my belief that secret enemies were conspiring, for their own bad purposes, to ruin my beloved relative and myself: and yet I call heaven to witness my solemn declaration that knowingly and wilfully we have wronged no one by word or deed!"

"Young woman!" exclaimed the Grand Inquisitor, "thou answerest my question evasively. Wast thou not an inmate of that most holy sanctuary, the Convent of Carmelite Nuns?—wast thou not there the companion of

Giulia of Arestino?—did not a sacrilegious horde of miscreants break into the convent, headed, or at least accompanied, by a certain Manuel d'Orsini, who was the lover of the Countess?—was not this invasion of the sacred place undertaken to rescue that guilty woman? and did she not find an asylum at the abode of your aunt, doubtless with your connivance, until the day of her arrest?"

"None of these circumstances, my lord," replied Flora, "do I attempt to deny: but it is so easy to give to them a variety of colourings, some of which, alas! may seem most unfavourable to my venerable relative and to myself. Oh! my lord, do with me what thou wilt," exclaimed Flora, clasping her hands together in a sudden paroxysm of anguish; "but release that aged woman,—suffer not my beloved aunt—my more than mother to be thus persecuted! Have mercy, my lord, upon her—oh! have mercy, great judge, upon her."

"Flora—dearest Flora," cried Dame Francatelli, the tears trickling fast down her countenance, "I do not wish to leave you—I do not seek to be set free—I will stay in this dreadful place so long as you remain a prisoner also; for, though we are separated—"

"Woman," exclaimed the Grand Inquisitor, not altogether unmoved by this touching scene, "the tribunal cannot take heed of supplications and prayers of an impassioned nature. It has to do with facts, not feelings."

At this moment there was a slight sensation amongst the Familiars stationed near the door of the judgment-hall; and an individual who had just entered the court, and who wore the black robe and the cap or toque of a counsellor, advanced towards the Grand Inquisitor.

"My lord," said the advocate, with a reverential bow, "the day after the arrest of these females I submitted to the Council of State a memorial setting forth certain facts, which induced the President of the Council to issue his warrant to order the postponement of the second examination of the two prisoners now before your Eminence, until this day."

"And the case has been postponed accordingly," answered the Grand Inquisitor. "It will now proceed, unless reasonable cause be shown for farther delay. The prisoners are obstinate. Instead of confessing their heinous crimes and throwing themselves on the mercy of heaven,—for past the hope of human mercy they assuredly are,—they break forth into impassioned language savouring of complaint. Indeed, the younger attributes to the machinations of unknown enemies the position in which she is placed. Yet have we positive proof that she was leagued with those who perpetrated the sacrifice which ended in the destruction of the Carmelite convent; and the elder prisoner gave refuge not only to the young girl her niece, but also to a woman more guilty still—thus rendering herself infamous as one who encouraged and concealed the enemies of the Church, instead of giving them up to the most Holy Inquisition. Wherefore," continued the Grand Inquisitor, "it remaineth only for me to order the prisoners to be put to the torture, that they may confess their crimes, and receive the condemnation which they merit."

At the terrible word "*torture*," Dame Francatelli uttered a cry of agony—but it was even more on account of her beloved niece than herself; while Flora, endowed with greater firmness than her aunt, would have flown to console and embrace her, had not the Familiars cruelly compelled the young maiden to retain her place.

"My lord," said Angelo Duras—for he was the advocate who appeared on behalf of the prisoners, "I formally and earnestly demand a delay of eight days ere this examination be proceeded with."

"It is impossible," returned the Grand Inquisitor, while his words went like ice-shafts to the hearts of the unhappy women. "In addition to the charges against them which I have already glanced at, it appeareth that one Alessandro Francatelli, who is nearly related to them both, hath abjured the Christian faith and become a Mussulman. This fact was reported many months ago to the Council of State; and in the cottage lately inhabited by the prisoners, was found a costly set of jewels, ornamented with sundry Moslem devices and symbols, all of which are hateful to the true Catholic. It is therefore natural to suppose that they themselves have secretly abjured their country's religion, and have already received the reward of their apostasy."

"No—never, never!" exclaimed the aunt, clasping her hands together, and showing by her tone and manner that she felt herself to be more outraged by this cruel suspicion than by any other portion of the treatment which she had received at the hands of the Inquisition.

On her side, Flora appeared to be astounded at the accusation made against her aunt and herself by the Grand Inquisitor.

"My lord," said Angelo Duras, "the very statement which has just been put forth by your Eminence furnishes a new ground whereon I base my requisition for a delay of eight days, in order to prepare a fitting defence on behalf of the prisoners. The Council of State is now sitting in deliberation on certain demands made by the newly arrived Ottoman Envoy, and should your Eminence refuse my requisition for a delay, it will be my duty forthwith to apply to that august body."

The Grand Inquisitor endeavoured to reason with the advocate on the inconvenience of obstructing the business of the tribunal;—but Angelo Duras, knowing that he had the law on his side, was firm; and the judge was finally compelled to accede to the delay.

Flora and her aunt were accordingly conveyed back each to her separate cell; while Angelo Duras retired, murmuring to himself, "I shall doubtless offend my brother by my conduct in this respect, after my solemn promise to him to abandon the cause of the Francatellis: but I prefer having obeyed that young man of god-like aspect and persuasive manner who visited me ere now to adjure me not to neglect my duty."

The next case that occupied the attention of the Grand Inquisitor on the present occasion, was that of the Jew, Isaacar ben Solomon.

The old man was indeed a miserable spectacle. His garments hung loosely about his wasted and attenuated form;—his countenance was wan and ghastly;—but the fire of his eyes was not altogether quenched. He was heavily chained;—and, as he walked between the two Familiars who led him into the tribunal, he could scarcely drag himself along. For the persecuted old man had been confined for nearly seven months in the prison of the Inquisition; and during that period he had suffered acutely with the damps of his dungeon—the wretched food doled out to him—and the anguish occasioned by conscious innocence unjustly accused of a dreadful crime.

"Jew," said the Grand Inquisitor, "when last thou wast examined by me, thou didst obstinately refuse to confess thy grievous sins. This is the day for the final investigation of thy case; and thou mayst produce witnesses in thy favour, if thou canst."

"My lord," replied Isaacar ben Solomon, in a weak and tremulous tone, "unless heaven should work a miracle in my favour, I have no hope in this life. I do not fear death, my lord;—for, persecuted—reviled, despised—accused as I am, I can yet lay my hand on my heart, and say, *I have never injured a fellow-creature*. But, my lord," he continued, his voice growing stronger with excitement, "it is sufficient that I am a Jew to ensure my condemnation;—and yet strange indeed is that Christian faith—or rather should I say most inconsistent is the conduct of those who profess it—in so far as this ruthless persecution of my race is concerned. For where, my lord, is your charity—where is your tolerance—where is your mercy? If I be indeed involved in mental darkness, 'tis for you to enlighten me with argument, not coerce me with chains. Never have I insulted a Christian on account of his creed: wherefore should I be insulted in respect to mine? Granting that the Jew is in error, he surely deserves pity—not persecution. For how came I by the creed which I profess? Even as your lordship obtained yours, which is that of a Christian. Our parents reared us each in the belief which they respectively professed; and there is no more merit due to your Eminence for being a Christian than there is blame to be attached to me for being a Jew. Had all the religions of the earth been submitted to our consideration, when we were children—and had it been said to each of us, '*Select a faith for yourself*';—then there might be some merit in choosing the one most popular and the most assuredly conducive to personal safety. But such was not the case, my lord; and I am a Jew for the same reason that you are a Christian—and I cling to the creed of my forefathers even as you adhere tenaciously to that with which your ancestors have handed down to you. Approach me not then, because I am a Jew. And now I will pass to another subject, my lord," continued Isaacar, becoming more and more animated as he proceeded. "I am accused of a fearful crime—of murder. The evidence rests upon the fact that stains of blood were observed upon the floor of a room in my house. The answer is simple. Two men—one of noble birth, the other a robber—fought in that room; and the blood of one of them flowed from a slight wound. This is the



truth—and yet I know that I am not believed. Merciful heavens! of what would you accuse me? Of murder!—and it was hinted, when last I stood before your Eminence, that the Jews have been known to slay Christian children as an offering to heaven. My lord, the Jews worship the same God as the Christians—for the Christians adopt that book in which the Jews put faith. Then I appeal to your Eminence whether the God whom the Christians worship would delight in such sacrifices; and as you must answer 'Nay,' the reply acquits the Jew also of the hideous calumny sought to be affixed upon us. The Jews, my lord, are a merciful and humane race. The records of your tribunals will prove that the Jews are not addicted to the shedding of blood. They are too patient—enduring—and resigned, to be given to vengeance. Behold how they cling to each other—how they assist each other in distress;—and charity is not narrowed to small circles, my lord—it is a sentiment which must become expansive, because it nourisheth itself and is cherished by those good feelings which are its only reward. Think you, my lord, that if I saw a fellow-creature starving in the street, I should wait to ask him whether he were a Christian, a Jew, or a Mussulman? Oh! no—no: the world's bread was given for men of all nations and all creeds."

Isaacchar would have continued his address to the Grand Inquisitor; but sheer exhaustion compelled him to desist—and he would have sunk upon the cold marble, had not the Familiars supported him.

"By his own words is he convinced of disbelief in the most holy Catholic faith," said the Grand Inquisitor. "But I find by a memorial which was addressed to me many months ago,—indeed, very shortly after the arrest of this miserable unbeliever,—and signed by Manuel, Marquis of Orsini, that the said Marquis hath important evidence to give on behalf of the Jew. Now, though Manuel d'Orsini be himself a prisoner of the Holy Office, yet as he hath not yet been judged, he is a competent witness."

Orders were then given to introduce the Marquis; and Isaacchar ben Solomon murmured to himself. "Is it possible that the young man can have felt sympathy for me? Ah! then I was not mistaken in him: methought, in spite of his dissipation and his wildness, that he possessed a generous heart."

In a few minutes the Marquis of Orsini was led into the judgment hall. He was chained;—but he carried his head erect—and, though his countenance was pale and care-worn, his spirit was not crushed.

He bowed respectfully, but not cringing, to the Grand Inquisitor, and bestowed a friendly nod of recognition upon the Jew.

"This memorial, dated in the month of March last, was signed by you?" said the Grand Inquisitor interrogatively, as he displayed a paper to the Marquis.

"That memorial was signed by me," answered Orsini, in a firm tone; "and I rejoice that your Eminence has at length granted me an opportunity of explaining the matter hinted at therein. Your Eminence sits there, it is presumed, to administer justice: then let justice be done towards this innocent man—albeit that he is a Jew,—for solemnly do I declare that the blood which stained the floor in Isaacchar's house, flowed from my right arm. And it may not be amiss to observe," continued the Marquis, "that the worthy Jew there did not only bind the wound for me with as much care as if I myself had been an Israelite, or he a Christian—but he moreover offered me aid of his purse:—and therefore am I under obligations to him which I can never wholly discharge. In good sooth, my lord," added Manuel, in whom neither a lengthened imprisonment nor the awful solemnity of the present scene could entirely subdue the flippancy which was habitual to his speech,—“in good sooth, my lord, he is a splendid specimen of a Jew—and I pray your Eminence to discharge him forthwith."

"This levity ill becometh you, Manuel d'Orsini," said the Grand Inquisitor; "for you yourself are in terrible danger."

Then, upon a signal given, the Familiars conveyed the Marquis back to his dungeon: but ere he left the judgment-hall, he had the satisfaction of beholding the Jew's eyes fixed upon him with an expression of boundless gratitude and deep sympathy. Tears too, were trickling down the cheeks of the Israelite, for the old man thought within himself, "What matters it if the rack dislocate my limbs? But it is shocking—oh! it is shocking to reflect that thy fellow-creature, noble youth, shall dare to deface and injure that god-like form of thine!"

"Jew," suddenly exclaimed the Grand Inquisitor, "I put no faith in the testimony of the witness who hath just appeared in thy favour. Confess thy sins—avow openly that thou hast murdered Christian children to obtain their blood for use in thy sacrifices—and seek forgiveness from heaven by embracing the faith of Jesus!"

The unhappy Israelite was so appalled by the open, positive, and undisguised manner in which an atrocious charge was revived against him, that he lost all power of utterance, and stood stupefied and agnast.

"Away with him to the Torture-Chamber!" cried the Grand Inquisitor, in a stern and remorseless tone.

"Monster!" exclaimed the Jew, suddenly recovering his speech, as that dreadful mandate warned him that he would now require all his energy—all his presence of mind:—"monster!" he repeated, in a voice indicative of loathing and contempt:—"and thou art a Christian!"

The Familiars hurried Isaacchar away to the Torture-Chamber, which, as we before stated, opened from the tribunal. And terrible, indeed, was the appearance of that earthly hell—that terrestrial Hades, invented by fiends in human shape—that den of horrors constituting, indeed, a fitting foretaste of trans-*Stygian* torment!

The Grand Inquisitor followed the victim and the Familiars into this awful place; and on a signal being given by that high functionary, Isaacchar was stripped of all his upper clothing, and stretched upon the accursed rack.

Then commenced the torture—the agonizing torture by means of that infernal instrument,—a torture which dislocated the limbs, appeared to tear the members asunder, and produced sensations as if all the nerves of the body were suddenly being drawn out through the brain!

"Dost thou confess? and wilt thou embrace the Christian faith?" demanded the Grand Inquisitor from time to time.

"I have nothing to confess—I will not renounce the creed of my forefathers!" answered Isaacchar in a tone of bitter agony, as he writhed upon the rack, while every fresh shock and jerk of the infernal engine seemed as if it would tear the very life out of him.

But the old man remained firm in the declaration of his innocence of the dreadful crime imputed to him; staunch also to his creed did he remain;—and, having endured the full extent of that special mode of torture, he was borne back to his dungeon—cruelly injured—with dislocated limbs—blood streaming from his mouth and nostrils—and these terrible wounds of the Grand Inquisitor ringing in his ears—"Obstinate and impenitent one, Satan claims thee as his own: therefore art thou condemned to death by fire at the approaching *auto-da-fé*!"

Half an hour afterwards another human being lay stretched upon that accursed rack:—and agonizing—oh! most agonizing were the female shrieks and rending screams which emanated from the lips of the tortured victim, but which reached not beyond the solid masonry of those walls and the massive iron-plated door.

The white and polished arms were stretched out, in a position fearfully painful, beyond the victim's head: and the wrists were fastened to a steel bar by means of this cord, which cut through flesh, muscle, and nerve to the very bone!

The ankles were attached in a similar manner to a bar at the lower end of the rack,—and thus from the female's hands and feet thick clots of gore fell on the stone pavement. But even the blood flowed not so fast from her lacerated limbs as streamed the big drops of agony from her distorted countenance—that countenance erst so beautiful, and so well beloved by thee, Manuel d'Orsini!

For, oh! upon that rack lay stretched the fair and half-naked form of Giulia of Arestino,—its symmetry convulsing in matchless tortures—the bosom palpitating awfully with the pangs of that earthly hell—and the exquisitely modelled limbs enduring all the hideous pains of dislocation, as if the fibres that held them in their sockets were drawn out to a tension at which they must inevitably snap in halves!

But who gazes on that awful spectacle?—whose ears drink in those agonizing screams, as if they made a delicious melody?

With folded arms—compressed lips—and remorseless, though ashy pale countenance, the old Lord of Arestino stands near the rack;—and if his eyes can for a moment

quit that feast which they devour so greedily, it is but to glance with demoniac triumph towards Manuel d'Orsini, whom an atrocious refinement of cruelty, suggested by the vengeful Count himself, has made a spectator of that appalling scene!

And terrible are the emotions which rend the heart of the young Marquis! But he is powerless—he cannot stretch forth a hand to save his mistress from the hellish torments which she is enduring: nor can he even whisper a syllable to inspire her with courage to support them. For he is bound tightly—the Familiars, too, have him in their iron grasp—and he is gagged!

the infernal vengeance of the old Italian noble;—for the remorseless judge urges on the fullest extent;—and while the creaking sound of wheels mingles with the cracking noise of dislocating limbs, the Count of Arestino exclaims, “I was once humane and benevolent, Giulia:—but thy conduct has made me a fiend!”

“A fiend!” shrieked the tormented woman: “Oh! yes—yes—thou art a fiend—a very fiend—I have wronged thee—but this vengeance is horrible—horrible—mercy—mercy!—oh! for one drop of water—mercy—mercy!”

The rack gave the last shock of which its utmost power was capable—a scream more dreadful, more

“NEVER HAD FERNAND BEHELD A BEING OF SUCH VENERABLE ASPECT.” (See p. 121.)

Nevertheless he can see—and he can hear;—he can behold the rending tortures of the rack—and he is compelled to listen to the piercing screams which the victim sends forth!

If he close his eyes upon the horrible spectacle, imagination instantly makes it more horrible even still; and moreover, in the true spirit of a chivalrous heart, he seeks by the tenderness of glances to impart at least a gleam of solace to the soul of her who has undergone so much, and is suffering now so much more, through her fatal love of him!

The Grand Inquisitor, who is an intimate friend of the Count of Arestino, ministers well and faithfully to

agonizing, more piercing than any of its predecessors, rent this time the very walls of the Torture-Chamber; and with that last outburst of mortal agony, the spirit of the guilty Giulia fled for ever!

Yet was not the vengeance of the Count of Arestino satisfied; and the Grand Inquisitor was prepared to gratify the hellish sentiment to its fullest extent.

The still warm and palpitating corpse of the Countess was hastily removed from the rack; and the Familiars stripped—nay, tore off the clothing of Manuel d'Orsini. The countenance of the young nobleman was now terribly sombre, as if the darkest thoughts were occupying his inmost soul; and his eyes were bent fixedly on

the dreadful engine to the tortures of which it appeared to be his turn to submit.

The Familiars, in order to divest him of his garments, and also to stretch him in such a way on the rack that his arms might be fastened over his head to the upper end of that instrument, had removed the chains and cords which had hitherto bound him.

And now the fatal moment seemed to be at hand; and the Familiars already grasped him rudely to hurl him on the rack, when, as if suddenly inspired by a superhuman strength, the young nobleman dashed the men from him; then, with lightning speed, he seized a massive iron bar that was used to move the windlass of the rack,—and in another instant, before a saving arm could intervene, the deadly implement struck down the Count of Arestino at the feet of the Grand Inquisitor, who started back with a cry of horror!

The next moment the Marquis was again powerless and secure in the grasp of the Familiars—but he had accomplished his purpose—he had avenged his mistress and himself—and the old Lord of Arestino lay, with shattered skull, a corpse upon the cold pavement of the Torture-Chamber!

"Back—back with the murderer to his dungeon!" exclaimed the Grand Inquisitor, in a tone of fearful excitement and rage. "We must not afford him a chance of dying upon that engine of torture. No—no: the lingering flames of the auto-da-fé are reserved for the Marquis d'Orsini!"

And in pursuance of the sentence thus pronounced, Mannel was hurried away to his dark and solitary cell, there to remain a prey to all the dreadful thoughts which the occurrences of that fatal evening were so well calculated to marshal in horrible array to his imagination.

#### CHAPTER LXIX.

##### THE EXPEDITION OF DEMETRIUS AGAINST THE BANDITTI.

WHILE these awful scenes were being enacted in the subterranean of the Holy Inquisition, Demetrius was actively engaged in directing those plans and effecting those arrangements which the scheming disposition of Nisida of Riverola had suggested.

We should observe that in the morning he had sought and found Antonio, with whom he had so expertly managed that the villain had fallen completely into the snare spread to entrap him, and had not only confessed that he held at his disposal the liberty of the Count of Riverola, but had also agreed to deliver him up to the Greek. In a word, everything in this respect took place precisely as Nisida had foreseen.

Accordingly, as soon as it was dark in the evening, sixty of the Ottoman soldiers quitted by twos and threes the mansion which the Florentine Government had appropriated as a dwelling for the Envoy and his suite. The men, whom Demetrius thus entrusted with the execution of his scheme, and whose energy and fidelity he had previously secured by means of liberal reward, and promise of more,—were disguised in different ways, but were all well armed. To be brief, so well were the various dispositions taken, and so effectually were they executed, that those sixty soldiers had concealed themselves in the grove indicated by their master without having excited in the minds of the Florentine people the least suspicion that anything unusual was about to take place.

It was close upon eleven o'clock at night, when Demetrius, after having obtained a hasty interview with Nisida, whom he acquainted with the progress of the plot, repaired to the grove wherein his men were already distributed, and took his station in the midst of the knot of olives on the right of the huge chestnut tree which overhung the chasm.

Nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed; and naught was heard save the waving of the branches and the rustling of foliage, as the breeze of night agitated the grove: but at the expiration of that brief period, the sound of voices was suddenly heard close by the chestnut tree,—not preceded by any footsteps nor other indication of the presence of men,—and thus appearing as if they had all at once and in an instant emerged from the earth.

Not a moment had elapsed—no, not a moment—ere those individuals whose voices were thus abruptly heard, were captured and secured by a dozen Ottoman soldiers, who sprang upon them from the dense thickets around or dropped amongst them from the branches overhead:—and so admirably was the swoop

made, that five persons were seized, bound, and held powerless and incapable of resistance ere the echo of the cry of alarm which they raised, had died away in the mazes of the grove.

And, simultaneously with the performance of this skillfully executed feat, a shrill whistle was wafted from the lips of Demetrius through the wood; and, as if by magic, a dozen torches were seen to light up, and numbers of men, with naked scimitars gleaming in the lurid rays of those firebrands, rushed towards the spot where the capture had been made. The effect of that sudden illumination—those flashing weapons—and that convergence of many warriors all towards the same point, was striking in the extreme, and, as the glare of the torches shone on the countenances of the four men in the midst of whom was Francisco (the whole five however being held bound and powerless by the Ottoman soldiers), it was evident that the entire proceeding had inspired the guilty wretches with the most painful alarm.

Demetrius instantly knew that the tall, handsome, and noble-looking young man in the midst of the group of captives and captors, must be Don Francisco of Riverola: and he also saw at a glance that one of the ruffians with him was Antonio. But he merely had leisure at the moment to address a word of re-assurance and friendship to Nisida's brother—for lo! the secret of the entrance to the robbers' stronghold was revealed—discovered! Yes—there, at the foot of the tree, and now rendered completely visible by the glare of the torch-light, was a small square aperture, from which the trap-door had been raised to afford egress to the captured party.

"Secure that entrance!" cried Demetrius hastily: "and hasten down those steps, some dozen of you, so as to guard it well!"—then, the instant this command was obeyed, he turned towards Francisco, saying, "Lord of Riverola—am I right in thus addressing you?"

"Such is my name," answered Francisco; "and if you, brave chief, will but release me and lend me a sword, I will prove to thee that I have no particular affection for these miscreants."

Demetrius gave the necessary order—and in another moment the young Count of Riverola was not only free, but with a weapon in his hand.

The Greek then made a rapid, but significant—fatally significant sign to his men; and—quick as thought—the three robbers and their confederate Antonio were strangled by the bow-strings which the Ottomans whipped around their necks. A few stifled cries—and all was over.

Thus perished the wretch Antonio—one of those treacherous, malignant, and avaricious Italians who bring dishonour on their noble nation,—a man who had sought to turn the vindictive feelings of the Count of Arestino to his own purposes, alike to fill his purse and to wreak his hateful spite on the Riverola family!

Scarcely was the tragedy enacted, when Demetrius ordered the four bodies to be conveyed down the steps disclosed by the trap-door:—"For," said he, "we will endeavour so to direct our proceedings that not a trace of them shall be left above ground; as the Florentines would not be well pleased if they learnt that foreign soldiers have undertaken the duties which they themselves should perform."

Several of the Ottomans accordingly bore the dead bodies down the steps; and Demetrius, accompanied by Francisco, followed at the head of the greater portion of the troops, a sufficient number, however, remaining behind to constitute a guard at the entrance of the stronghold.

While they were yet descending the stone stairs, Demetrius seized the opportunity of that temporary lull in the excitement of the night's adventures, to give Francisco hasty but most welcome tidings of his sister; and the reader may suppose that the generous-hearted young Count was overjoyed to learn that Nisida was not only alive, but also once more an inmate of the ancestral home. Demetrius said nothing relative to Flora; and Francisco, not dreaming for a moment that his deliverer even knew there was such a being in existence, asked no questions on that subject. His anxiety was not however the less to fly to the cottage;—for it must be remembered that he was arrested first on the 3rd of July, and had yet to learn all the afflictions which had fallen upon Flora and her aunt,—afflictions of the existence whereof he had been kept in utter ignorance by the banditti during his long captivity of nearly three months in their stronghold.

But while we are thus somewhat depressing, the in-

raders are penetrating farther into that stronghold. Headed by Demetrius and Francisco, and all carrying their drawn scimitars in their hands, the corps proceeds along a vast vaulted subterranean, paved with large flag-stones, until a huge iron door, studded with nails, bars the way."

"Stay," whispered Francisco, suddenly recollecting himself: "I think that I can devise a means to induce the rogues to open this portal—or I am much mistaken."

He accordingly seized a torch and hurried back to the foot of the stoupe steps; in the immediate vicinity of which he searched narrowly for some object. At last he discovered the object of his investigation—namely a large bell hanging in a niche, and from which a strong wire ran up through the ground to the surface. This bell Francisco set ringing, and then hurried back to rejoin his deliverers.

Scarcely was he again by the side of Demetrius, when he saw that this stratagem had fully succeeded; for the iron door swung heavily round on its hinges and in another moment the cries of terror which the two robber sentinels raised on the inner side, were hushed for ever by the Turkish scimitars.

Down another flight of steps the invaders then precipitated themselves, another door, at the bottom, having been opened in compliance with the same signal which had led to the unfolding of the first;—and now the alarm was given by the sentinels guarding that second post,—those sentinels flying madly on, having beheld the immolation of their comrades.

But Demetrius and Francisco speedily overtook them, just as they emerged from another long vaulted and paved cavern-passage, and were about to cross a plank which connected the two sides of a chasm in whose depths a rapid stream rushed gurgling on.

Into the turbid waters the two fugitive sentinels were cast: over the bridge poured the invaders,—and into another caverned corridor, hollowed out of the solid rock, did they enter,—the torch-bearers following immediately behind the Greek and the young Count.

It was evident that neither the cries of the surprised sentinels nor the tread of the invaders had alarmed the main corps of the banditti; for, on reaching a barrier formed by massive folding-doors, and knocking thereat, the portals instantly began to move on their hinges;—and in rushed the Ottoman soldiers, headed by their two gallant Christian leaders.

The robbers were in the midst of a deep carouse in their magnificent cavern-hall, when their festivity was thus rudely interrupted.

"We are betrayed!" thundered Lomellino, the captain of the horde: "to arms! to arms!"

But the invaders allowed them no time to concentrate themselves in a serried phalanx,—and a tremendous carnage ensued. Surprised and taken unawares as they were, the banditti fought as if a spell were upon them, paralysing their energies and warning them that their last hour was come. The terrible scimitars of the Turks hewed them down in all directions: some, who sought to fly, were literally cut to pieces;—Lomellino fell beneath the sword of the gallant Count of Riverola;—and within twenty minutes after the invaders first set foot in the banquetting-hall, not a soul of the formidable horde was left alive.

Demetrius abandoned the plunder of the den to his troops; and when the portable part of the rich booty had been divided amongst them to their satisfaction, they followed their leaders back to the grove into which the entrance of the stronghold opened.

When the subterranean thus entirely cleared of the living, and the dead alone remained in that place which had so long been their home, and was now their tomb, Demetrius ordered his forces to disperse and return to their quarters in Florence in the same prudent manner which had characterized their egress thence a few hours before.

Francisco and Demetrius, being left alone together in the grove, proceeded by torch-light to close the trap-door, which they found to consist of a thick plate of iron covered with earth so prepared, by glutinous substances, no doubt, that it was as hard as rock; and thus, when the trap was shut down, not even a close inspection would lead to a suspicion of its existence, so admirably did it fit into its setting and correspond with the soil all around. It required, moreover, but a slight exercise of their imaginative powers, to enable Demetrius and Francisco to conjecture that every time any of the banditti had come forth from their stronghold, they were accustomed to strew a little fresh earth over the entire

spot, and thus afford an additional precaution against the chance of detection on the part of any one who might chance to stray in that direction. We may also add that the trap-door was provided with a massive bolt which fastened inside, when closed, and that the handle of the bell-wire, which gave the signal to open the trap, was concealed in a small hollow in the old chestnut tree.

Having thus satisfied his curiosity by means of these discoveries, Demetrius accompanied Francisco to the city; and during their walk thither, he informed the young Count that he was an Envoy from the Ottoman Grand Vizier to the Florentine Government—that he had become acquainted with Nisida on board the ship which delivered her from her lonely residence on an island in the Mediterranean—and that as she had by some means or other learnt where Francisco was imprisoned, he had undertaken to deliver him.

The young Count renewed his warmest thanks to the chivalrous Greek for the kind interest which he had manifested in his behalf; and they separated at the gate of the Riverola mansion, into which Francisco hurried to embrace his sister, while Demetrius repaired to his own abode.

## CHAPTER LXX.

### ANOTHER STEP IN THE VENGEANCE OF NISIDA.

THE meeting between Nisida and her brother Francisco was affecting in the extreme; and for a brief space the softer feelings of the lady's nature triumphed over those strong, turbulent, and concentrated passions which usually held such indomitable sway over her. For her attachment to him was profound and sincere; and the immense sacrifices she had made in what she conceived to be his welfare and interests, had tended to strengthen this almost boundless love.

On his side, the young Count was rejoiced to behold his sister, whose strange disappearance and long absence had filled his mind with the worst apprehensions. Yes—he was rejoiced to see her once more beneath the ancestral roof; and, with all a fond brother's pride, he surveyed her splendid countenance, which triumph and happiness now invested with an animation that rendered her surpassingly beautiful!

A few brief and rapidly given explanations were exchanged between them, by means of the language of the fingers,—Francisco satisfying Nisida's anxiety in respect to the success of her project by which the total extermination of the banditti had been effected,—and she conveying to him as much of the outline of her adventures during the last seven months as she thought it prudent to impart.

They then separated, it being now very late; and moreover Nisida had still some work in hand for that night!

The moment Francisco was alone, he exclaimed aloud, "Oh! it is possible that this dear sister who loves me so much, is really the bitter enemy of Flora? But to-morrow—to-morrow I must have a long explanation with Nisida; and heaven grant that she may not stand in the way of my happiness! O Flora—dearest Flora, if you knew how deeply I have suffered on your account during my captivity in that accursed cavern! And what must you have thought of my disappearance—my absence? Alas! did the same vengeance which pursued me, wreak its spite also on thee, fair girl?—did the miscreant Antonio, who boastfully proclaimed himself to my face the author of my captivity, and who sullenly refused to give me any tidings of those whom I cared for, and of what was passing in the world without,—did he dare to molest thee? But suspense is intolerable—I cannot endure it even for a few short hours!—No—I will speed me at once to the dwelling of my Flora, and thus assuage her grief and put an end to my own fears at the same time!"

Having thus resolved, Francisco repaired to his own apartment, enveloped himself in a cloak, secured weapons of defence about his person, and then quitted the mansion, unperceived by a living soul.

Almost at the same time, but by another mode of egress—namely, the private staircase leading from her own apartments into the garden, and which has been so often mentioned in the course of this narrative—Donna Nisida stole likewise from the Riverola palace.

She was habited in male attire; and beneath her doublet she wore the light but strong cuirass which she usually donned ere setting out on any nocturnal enterprise, and which she was now particularly cautious not to omit from the details of her toilette, inasmuch as the mysterious appearance of the muffled figure, which had

alarmed her on the preceding evening, induced her to adopt every precaution against secret and unknown enemies.

Whither was the Lady Nisida now hurrying, through the dark streets of Florence?—what new object had she in contemplation?

Her way was bent towards an obscure neighbourhood in the immediate vicinity of the cathedral; and in a short time she reached the house in which Dame Margaretha, Antonio's mother, dwelt.

She knocked gently at the door, which was shortly opened by the old woman, who imagined it was her son that sought admittance; for, though in the service of the Count of Arestino, Antonio was often kept abroad late by the various machinations in which he had been engaged, and it was by no means unusual for him to seek his mother's dwelling at all hours.

Margaretha, who appeared in a loose wrapper hastily thrown on, held a lamp in her hand; and when its rays streamed not on the countenance of her son, but showed the form of a cavalier handsomely apparelled, she started back in mingled astonishment and fear. A second glance, however, enabled her to recognise the Lady Nisida; and an exclamation of wonder escaped her lips.

Nisida entered the house—closed the door behind her—and motioned Dame Margaretha to lead the way into the nearest apartment. The old woman obeyed tremblingly; for she feared that the lady's visit boded no good; and this apprehension on her part was not only enhanced by her own knowledge of all Antonio's treachery towards Count Francisco, but also by the imperious manner, determined looks, and strange disguise of her visitress.

But Margaretha's terror speedily gave way to indescribable astonishment, when Nisida suddenly addressed her in a language which not for many, many years had the old woman heard flow from that delicious mouth!

"Margaretha," said Nisida, "you must prepare to accompany me forthwith! Be not surprised to hear me thus capable of rendering myself intelligible by means of an organ on which a seal was so long placed! A marvellous cure has been accomplished in respect to me, during my absence from Florence. But you must prepare to accompany me, I say: your son, Antonio—"

"My son!" ejaculated the woman, now again trembling from head to foot, and surveying Nisida's countenance in a manner denoting the acutest suspense.

"Your son is wounded—mortally wounded in a street-skirmish—"

"Wounded!" shrieked Margaretha. "Oh! dear lady—tell me all—tell me the worst! What has happened to my unfortunate son? He is dead—he is dead! Oh! I know that he is dead! Your manner convinces me that hope is past!"

And she wrung her hands bitterly, while tears streamed down her wrinkled cheeks.

"No—he is not dead, Margaretha!" exclaimed Nisida; "but he is dying—and he implored me, by everything I deem sacred, to hasten hither, and fetch you to him, that he may receive your blessing and close his eyes in peace."

"In peace!" repeated the old woman bitterly: then, to herself she said, "Donna Nisida suspects not his perfidy—knows not all his wickedness."

"Delay not!" urged the lady, perceiving what was passing in her mind. "You are well aware that my brother, who, alas! has disappeared most mysteriously, dismissed Antonio abruptly from his service many months ago: but, whatever were the cause, it is forgiven at least by me. So, tarry not—but prepare to accompany me!"

Margaretha hastened to her bed-room, and re-appeared in a few minutes, completely dressed and ready to issue forth.

"Keep close by me," said Nisida, as she opened the house-door; and breathe not a word as we pass through the streets. I have reasons of my own for assuming a disguise, and wish not to be recognised."

Margaretha was too much absorbed in the contemplation of the afflicting intelligence which she had received, to observe anything at all suspicious in these injunctions; and thus it was that the two females proceeded in silence through the streets leading towards the Riverola mansion.

By means of a pass-key Nisida opened the wicket-gate of the spacious gardens; and she traversed the grounds, Margaretha walking by her side.

In a few minutes they reached a low door, affording admission into the basement-storey of the palace, and of which Nisida also possessed the key.

"Go first," said the lady, in a scarcely audible whisper: "I must close the door behind us."

"But wherefore this way?" demanded Margaretha, a sudden apprehension starting up in her mind. "This door leads down to the cellars."

"The officers of justice are in search of Antonio—and I am concealing him for your sake," was the whispered and rapid assurance given by Nisida. "Would you have him die in peace in your arms, or perish on the scaffold?"

Margaretha shuddered convulsively, and hurried down the dark flight of stone steps upon which the door opened. Terrible emotions raged in her bosom—indescribable alarms, grief, suspicion, and also a longing eagerness to put faith in the apparent friendship of Nisida.

"Give me your hand," said the lady;—and the hand that was thrust into hers was cold and trembling.

Then Nisida hurried Margaretha along a narrow subterranean passage, in which the blackest night reigned; and, though the old woman was a prey to apprehensions that increased each moment to a fearful degree, she dared not utter a word either to question—to implore—or to remonstrate.

At length they stopped; and Nisida, dropping Margaretha's hand, drew back heavy bolts which raised ominous echoes in the vaulted passage. In another moment a door began to move stubbornly on its hinges; and almost at the same time a faint light gleamed forth—increasing in power as the door opened wider, but still attaining no greater strength than that which a common iron lamp could afford.

Margaretha's anxious glances were instantly plunged into the cellar or vault to which the door opened, and whence the light came; but she saw no one within. It however appeared as if some horrible reminiscence, connected with the place, came back to her startled mind; for, falling on her knees, and clinging wildly to her companion, she cried in a piercing tone, "Oh! lady, wherefore have you brought me hither?—where is my son?—what does all this horrible mystery mean? But, chiefly now of all—why, why are we here—at this hour?"

"In a few moments you shall know more!" exclaimed Nisida;—and, as she spoke, with an almost superhuman strength she dragged—or rather flung the prostrate woman into the vault,—rushing in herself immediately afterwards, and closing the door behind her.

"Holy God!" shrieked Margaretha, gazing wildly around the damp and naked walls of solid masonry, and then up to the lamp suspended to the arched ceiling, "is this the place? But, no—you are ignorant of all that—it was not for that that you brought me hither! Speak, lady—speak! Where is Antonio?—what have I done to merit thy displeasure? Oh! mercy—mercy! Bend not those terrible glances upon me! Your eyes flash fire! You are not Nisida—you are an evil spirit! Oh! mercy—mercy!"

And thus did the miserable woman rave, as, kneeling upon the cold damp ground, she extended her tightly clasped her hands in an imploring manner towards Nisida, who, drawn up to her full height, was contemplating the grovelling wretch with eyes that seemed to shoot forth shafts of devouring flames.

Terrible, indeed, was the appearance of Nisida! Like to an avenging deity was she,—no longer a woman in the glory of her charms and the elegance of her disguise—but a fury—a very fiend—an implacable demon—armed with the blasting lightnings of infernal malignity and hellish rancour!

"Holy Virgin! protect me," shrieked Margaretha, every nerve thrilling with the agony of ineffable alarm.

"Yes—call upon heaven to aid you, vile woman!" said Nisida, in a thick, hoarse, and strangely altered voice: "for you are beyond the reach of human aid! Know ye whose remains—or rather, the mangled portions of whose remains—lie in this unconsecrated ground? Ah! well may you start in horror and surprise—for I know all—"

A terrific scream burst from the lips of Margaretha; and she threw her wild looks around as if she were going mad!

"Detestable woman!" exclaimed Nisida, fixing her burning eyes more intently still on Margaretha's countenance; "you are now about to pay the penalty of your complicity in the most odious crimes that ever made nights terrible in Florence! But I must torture, ere I slay ye! Yes—I must give thee a foretaste of that hell to which your soul is soon to plunge down! Know, then, that Antonio—your son Antonio—is no more. Not three hours have elapsed since he was slain—assassinated

—murdered, if you will so call it,—and by my commands!”

“Oh! lady, have pity upon me—pity upon me, a bereaved mother!” implored the old woman, in a voice of anguish so penetrating, that, vile as she was, it would have moved any human being save Nisida. “Do not kill me—spare me—and I will end my miserable days in a convent! Give me time to repent of all my sins—for they are numerous and great! Oh! spare me, dear lady—have mercy upon me—have mercy upon me!”

“What mercy had you on them whose mangled remains are buried in the ground beneath your feet?” demanded Nisida, in a voice almost suffocated with rage. “Prepare for death—your last moment is at hand!”—and a bright dagger suddenly flashed in the lamp-light.

“Mercy—mercy!” exclaimed Margaretha, springing forward, and grasping Nisida’s knees.

“I know not what mercy is!” cried the terrible Italian woman, raising the long, bright, glittering dagger over her head.

“Holy God! protect me! Lady—dear lady, have pity upon me!” shrieked the agonizing wretch, her countenance hideously distorted, and appallingly ghastly, as it was raised in such bitter earnest appeal towards that of the avengeress. “Again I say, mercy—mercy!”

“Die, fiend!” exclaimed Nisida: and the dagger, descending with lightning speed, sank deep into the bosom of the prostrate victim.

A dreadful cry burst from the lips of the wretched woman; and she fell back—a corpse!

“Oh! my dear—my well-beloved—and never-to-be-forgotten mother!” said Nisida, falling upon her knees by the side of the body, and gazing intently upward—as if her eyes could pierce the entire building overhead, and catch a glimpse of the spirit of the parent whom she thus apostrophised;—“pardon me—pardon me for this deed! Thou didst enjoin me to abstain from vengeance: but when I thought of all thy wrongs, the contemplation drove me mad,—and an irresistible power—a force which I could not resist—has hurried me on to achieve the punishment of this wretch who was so malignant an enemy of thine! Dearest mother, pardon me—look not down angrily on thy daughter!”

Then Nisida gave way to all the softer emotions which attended the reaction that her mind was now rapidly undergoing, after being so highly strung as for the last few hours it was;—and her tears fell in torrents.

For some minutes she remained in her kneeling position, and weeping, till she grew afraid—yes, afraid of being in that lonely place, with the corpse stretched on the ground,—a place, too, which for other reasons awoke such terrible recollections in her mind.

Starting to her feet—and neither waiting to extinguish the lamp which she herself had lighted at an earlier period of the night, nor to withdraw her dagger from the bosom of the murdered Margaretha—Nisida fled from the vault, and regained her own apartment in safety and unperceived.

When morning dawned, Nisida rose from a couch in which she had obtained two hours of troubled slumber, and, having hastily dressed herself, proceeded to the chamber of her brother Francisco.

But he was not there—nor had his bed been slept in during the past night.

“He is searching after his Flora!” thought Nisida. “Alas! poor youth—how it grieves me thus to be compelled to thwart thee in thy love! But my oath—and thine interests, Francisco demand this conduct on my part. And better—better is it that thou shouldst hear from strangers the terrible tidings that thy Flora is a prisoner in the dungeons of the Inquisition, where she can issue forth only to proceed to the stake! Yes—and better too, is it that she should die, than that this marriage shall be accomplished!”

Nisida quitted the room, and repaired to the apartment where the morning repast was served up.

A note, addressed to herself, lay upon the table. She instantly recognised the handwriting of Dr. Duras—tore open the billet—and read the contents as follows:—

“My brother Angelo came to me very late last night, and informed me that a sense of imperious duty compelled him to change his mind relative to the two women Fracatelli. He accordingly appeared on their behalf, and obtained a delay of eight days. But nothing can save them from condemnation at the end of this period, unless, indeed, immense interest is made on their

account with the duke. My brother alone deserves your blame, dear friend, let not your anger fall on your affectionate and devoted servant,

“JERONIMO DURAS.”

Nisida bit her lip with vexation. She now regretted that she had effected the liberation of Francisco before she was convinced that Flora was past the reach of human mercy;—but, in the next moment, she resumed her haughty composure, as she said within herself, “My brother may essay all his influence: but mine shall prevail!”

Scarcely had she established this determination in her mind, when the door was burst open, and Francisco—pale, ghastly, and with eyes wandering wildly—staggered into the apartment.

Nisida, who really felt deeply on his account, sprang forward—received him in her arms—and supported him to a seat.

“Oh! Nisida, Nisida!” he exclaimed aloud, in a tone expressive of deep anguish: “what will become of your unfortunate brother? But it is not you who have done this! No—for you were not in Florence at the time which beheld the cruel separation of Flora and myself!”

And, throwing himself on his sister’s neck, he burst into tears.

He had apostrophised her in the manner just related, not because he fancied she could hear or understand him; but because he forgot, in the paroxysms of his grief, that Nisida was (as he believed) deaf and dumb!

She wound her arms around him—she pressed him to her bosom—she covered his pale forehead with kisses; while her heart bled at the sight of his alarming sorrow.

Suddenly he started up—flung his arms wildly about—and exclaimed in a frantic voice, “Bring me my steel panoply! give me my burgoonet—my cuirass—and my trusty sword;—and let me arouse all Florence to a sense of its infamy in permitting that terrible Inquisition to exist! Bring me my armour, I say—the same sword that I wielded on the walls of Rhodes—and I will soon gather a trusty band to aid me!”

But, overcome with excitement, he fell forward—dashing his head violently upon the floor, before Nisida could save him.

She peeled the silver bell that was placed upon the breakfast-table, and assistance soon came. Francisco was immediately conveyed to his chamber—Dr. Duras was sent for—and on his arrival, he pronounced the young nobleman to be labouring under a violent fever. The proper medical precautions were adopted; and the physician was in a few hours able to declare that Francisco was in no imminent danger, but that several days would elapse ere he could possibly become convalescent.

Nisida remained by his bed-side, and was most assiduous—most tender—most anxious in her attentions towards him; and when he raved, in his delirium, of Flora and the Inquisition, it went to her very heart to think that she was compelled by a stern necessity to abstain from exerting her influence to procure the release of one whose presence would prove of far greater benefit to the sufferer than all the anodynes and drugs which the skill of Dr. Duras might administer!

## CHAPTER LXXI.

### THE SICK ROOM.—FLORENCE IN DISMAY.

It was about an hour past daybreak on the 1st of October,—five days after the incidents related in the three preceding chapters.

Nisida, worn out with long watchings and vigils in her brother’s chamber, had retired to her own apartment; but not before she had seen Francisco fall into a sleep which, under the influence of a narcotic ordered by the physician, promised to be long and soothing.

The lady had not quitted the chamber of the invalid ten minutes, when the door was slightly opened, and some one’s looks were plunged rapidly and searchingly into the room,—then the visitor, doubtless satisfied by the result of his survey, stole cautiously in.

He advanced straight up to the table which stood near the bed—drew a small phial from the bosom of his doublet—and poured its crystal contents into the beverage prepared to quench the thirst of the invalid.

Then, as he again secured the phial about his person, he murmured, “The medicaments of Christian Rosen-cruz will doubtless work greater wonders than those of Dr. Duras, skilled though the latter be!”

Having thus mused to himself, the visitor shook Francisco gently; and the young Count awoke, exclaiming



petulantly that he was athirst. A goblet of the beverage containing the Roscicrucian fluid was immediately conveyed to his lips; and he drank the refreshing draught with eagerness.

The effect was marvellous indeed;—a sudden tinge of healthy red appeared upon the cheeks a moment before so ashy pale—and fire once more animated the blue eyes—and Francisco recovered complete consciousness and self-possession for the first time since the dread morning when he was attacked with a dangerous illness.

He closed his eyes for a few minutes; and when he opened them again, he was surprised to perceive by his bedside a young, well-attired, and very handsome man, whose countenance appeared to be familiar to him.

"Count of Riverola," said the visitor, bending over him, and speaking in a low but kind tone, "despair not! Succour is at hand—and ere forty-eight hours shall have passed away, your well-beloved Flora will be free!"

Joy lighted up the countenance of the young nobleman as these delightful words met his ears;—and, seizing his consoler's hand, he exclaimed, "A thousand thanks for this assurance! But, have we not met before?—or was it in those wild dreams which have haunted my imagination, that I have seen thee?"

"Yes—we have met before, Count," was the reply. "Dost thou not remember Fernand Wagner?"

Francisco passed his hand across his brow, as if to collect his scattered thoughts: then, at the expiration of a few moments, he said, "Oh, yes—I recollect you well! But where have you been so long? Do you know that I had conceived a great friendship for you, when some strange incident—I cannot remember what, and it is of no matter—parted us?"

"Do not excite yourself too much, by racking your memory to decipher the details of the past," returned Wagner. "I dare not stay another minute with you now: therefore listen attentively to what more I have to say. Yield yourself not up to despondency—on the contrary, cherish every hope that is dear to you. Within a few days Flora shall be yours! Yes—solemnly do I assure you that all shall take place as I affirm. But your agency is not needed to ensure her liberation: heaven will make use of other means. Compose your mind, then,—and suffer not yourself to be tortured by vain fears as to the future. Above all, keep my visit to thee a profound secret—intimate not to thy sister Nisida that thou hast seen me. Follow my counsel in all these respects—and happiness is in store for thee!"

Fernand pressed the young Count's hand warmly as he terminated these rapidly delivered injunctions, and then retreated from the chamber ere the invalid had time to utter a syllable indicative of his gratitude.

But how different was Francisco now—how different did Nisida find him, on her return to his room, from what he was when she had left him two hours before! Nor less was Dr. Durns astonished, at his next visit, to perceive that his patient had made in those two hours as rapid strides towards convalescence as he could barely have hoped to see accomplished in a week.

In obedience to a hint rapidly conveyed by a signal from Nisida to the physician, the latter touched gently upon the subject of Flora Francatelli: but Francisco, resolute in his endeavours to follow the advice of Fernand Wagner, and to avoid all topics calculated to excite, responded briefly, and immediately spoke on another matter.

But he did not think the less deeply on that interesting subject. No: he cherished the image of his Flora, and the hope of being yet united to her, with an enthusiasm which a love so ardent as his passion alone could feel.

And Nisida congratulated herself on the conviction which she now very naturally entertained, that he had resigned himself to the loss of the young maiden, and was exerting his utmost to banish her altogether from his memory.

Throughout that day Francisco continued to improve rapidly; and on the following morning he was enabled to leave his couch. Indeed, his recovery was so marvellously quick, that Dr. Durns considered it to be a perfect phenomenon in the history of medicine; and Nisida looked upon the physician, whom she conceived to be the author of this remarkable change, with unfeigned admiration.

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It was verging towards the hour of sunset, on the 2nd of October, when a rumour of a most alarming nature circulated with the celerity of wildfire throughout the

city of Florence. At first the report was received with contemptuous incredulity;—but by degrees—as circumstances tended to confirm it,—as affrighted peasants came flying into the town from their country homes, bearing the dread tidings,—the degenerate and voluptuous Florentines gave way to all the terrors which, in such a case, were too well adapted to fill the hearts of an emaciated people with dismay.

For, while the dwellers in the City of Flowers were thinking only of the gay festivals which invariably commenced their winter season,—while the noble and wealthy burghers were whiling their time pleasantly in the regilding and decoration of their palaces or mansions,—while the Duke was projecting splendid banquets, and the members of the Council of State were dreaming of recreation and enjoyment, rather than of the duties of office,—while, too, preparations were being made for the approaching *auto-da-fé*—that terrible spectacle which the Inquisition annually offered to the morbid tastes of a priest-ridden people,—while, in a word, Florence seemed wrapped up in security and peace,—at such a moment the astounding intelligence arrived, that a mighty army was within a few hours' march of the sovereign city of Tuscany!

Yes!—these were the news that suddenly spread confusion and dismay throughout Florence,—the news which told how the Ottoman fleet, for some days past moored off the port of Leghorn, had vomited forth its legions,—and how the formidable force was approaching at a rapid rate, under the command of the Grand Vizier in person—the Seraskier and Sipahsalar of the armies of the Sultan!

The moment these tidings were bruited abroad in the city, Demetrius, the Greek, fled secretly—for he too well understood that his treacherous intentions had, in some unaccountable manner, transpired, and reached the ears of Ibrahim-Pasha. Nisida was perfectly astounded; and, for the first time in her life, she felt all her energies paralysed—all her powers of combination suddenly laid prostrate. As for Francisco—he could not help thinking that the invasion of Italy by the Turks was connected with the succour so mysteriously, but confidently promised by Wagner; although he was not only ignorant of the relationship subsisting between the Grand Vizier and his beloved Flora, but was even unaware of the fact that this high functionary was the same Ibrahim whose prisoner he had been in the Island of Rhodes.

The Council of State assembled to deliberate upon the proper course which should be adopted at so critical a moment; but when the resources of Florence and the means of resisting the invaders were scrutinized—when it was discovered that there were not three thousand soldiers to defend the place, nor arms sufficient to equip more than fifteen hundred volunteers in addition to the regular force—all idea of attempting to make a stand against an army which was in reality twenty thousand strong, but which the exaggerations of fear had trebled in amount, was ultimately abandoned.

The sun went down, and was succeeded by no illuminations that night. Florence was in mourning. A spell had fallen upon the City of Flowers: her streets were deserted;—and within the houses, those who possessed wealth were busily engaged in concealing their gold and jewels in cellars, holes dug in the ground, or at the bottom of wells. The general consternation was terrific indeed; and the solemn stillness which prevailed throughout the town so lately full of animation and happiness, was even more dreadful than that which had accompanied the plague two centuries before!

It was near midnight when messengers from the Grand Vizier, who was now within three miles' march of the city, arrived at the western gate, and demanded admission that they might obtain an immediate audience of the Duke. The request was directly complied with; and the envoys were conducted to the Palazzo, where the Prince immediately assembled the Council of State to receive them, himself presiding.

The audience was in other respects strictly private; but the nature of the interview was soon proved to have been most unexpectedly pacific; for two hours after the reception of the envoys, cries proceeded throughout the city, proclaiming the joyful news that the Grand Vizier had of his own accord proposed such terms as the Council of State had not hesitated to accept.

Thus, at two o'clock in the morning, were the Florentines at first alarmed by hearing the monotonous voices of the cries breaking upon the solemn stillness; but their fears changed into gladness ineffable, ere those

functionaries had uttered a dozen words of the proclamation which they were entrusted to make.

What the terms were did not immediately transpire;—but two circumstances which occurred ere it was day-break, and which, though conducted with considerable secrecy, nevertheless soon became known,—these circumstances, we say, afforded ample scope for comment and gossip.

The first was the occupation of the Riverola palace by Ottoman soldiers who had accompanied Demetrius as an escort, and whom he had left in Florence;—and the second was the fact that two females, closely muffled up, were removed from the prison of the Inquisition, and delivered over to the charge of the Grand Vizier's messengers, who conveyed them out of the city.

But the curiosity excited by these incidents was absorbed in the general anxiety that was evinced by the Florentine people to feast their eyes with the grand, interesting, and imposing spectacle which the dawn of day revealed to their view.

For, far as the eye could reach, on the western side of Florence, and commencing at the distance of about a quarter of a mile from the city, a mass of innumerable tents and pavilions showed where the Ottoman army was encamped! Myriads of banners, of all colours, floated from the tall javelins to which they were affixed before the entrances of the chief officers' tents; and in front of the entire encampment waved, at the summit of a spear planted in the ground, the three horse-tails which invariably preceded the march of a Turkish army. The sunbeams glittered on thousands of bright crescents; and the brazen pomells of the mounted sentinels' saddles shone like burnished gold. It was, indeed, a grand and imposing spectacle;—and the din of innumerable voices mingling with the sounds of martial music reached the ears of those Florentines, who, more daring than the rest, advanced nearly up to the outposts of the encampment.

But, in the meantime, a scene of profound and touching interest had taken place in the gorgeous pavilion of the Grand Vizier.

## CHAPTER LXXII.

### THE PAVILION OF THE GRAND VIZIER.

WHILE it was yet dark—and ere that martial panorama of tents and pavilions developed itself to the admiring and astonished eyes of the Florentines—two females closely muffled in handsome cachmere shawls, which had been presented to them for the purpose, were threading the Ottoman encampment, under the guidance of messengers, to whom they had been consigned.

It is hardly necessary to inform the reader that these females were the elder Signora Francatelli and her beautiful niece, Flora.

Their sudden and most unexpected deliverance from the terrible dungeon of the Inquisition, and the profound respect with which they were treated by those into whose charge the Familiars of the Holy Office had surrendered them, inspired them with the most lively joy; and their congratulations were expressed by frequent pressures of each other's hands as they proceeded in company with their guides. But they knew not by whom, nor how, nor wherefore they had been released;—and yet a vague suspicion, founded solely on the fact that their conductors wore the Ottoman garb, that Alessandro must be in some way connected with the matter, had entered their minds. It was, at all events, clear that no harm was intended them—for they were not treated as prisoners;—and thus they hastened on in confidence and hope.

It was not until they had left the city some distance behind, that the bright moon showed them a confused mass of white objects in front; and they were both marvelling what the strange and unknown spectacle could be, when their party was suddenly challenged by the sentries of an outpost. The leader of the little escort gave the watchword; and now as the two females drew near to the encampment, the mass of white objects became more shapely—until, in a few minutes, the pointed tops of the tents and pavilions stood out in strong relief against the purple sky.

What could this unusual spectacle mean? They were till in the dungeons of the Inquisition when the alarm caused by an approaching army had circulated through Florence; and the rumour had not reached their ears. For the first time since the moment of their release they now hung back, and manifested signs of fear.

"Be not terrified, ladies," said the chief of the escort, speaking in excellent Italian; "ye have no cause for apprehension! Before you spread the innumerable tents of the Ottoman army; and it is to the presence of this mighty host that ye are indebted for your freedom."

"But whither are you taking us?" inquired Flora, scarcely reassured.

"To the pavilion of his Highness, Ibrahim-Pacha, the Grand Vizier of the glorious Sultan Solymán," answered the Turk: "and at the hands of that powerful Minister ye will receive naught but honourable and kind treatment."

"Know you, signor," inquired Flora, "if there be in the Ottoman camp, a young man, who when a Christian," she added with a profound sigh, "bore the name of Alessandro Francatelli?"

"There is such a young man," responded the Turkish messenger; "and you will see him presently."

"Oh! is it then to him that we owe our deliverance?" demanded the beauteous maiden, her heart fluttering with varied emotions at the idea of meeting her brother. "Is he attached to the person of that mighty chief whom you denominate the Grand Vizier?—and shall we see him in the pavilion of his Highness?"

"You will see him in the pavilion of his Highness," answered the Turk.

"And the Grand Vizier himself—is he a good, a kind man?" asked Flora. "Is my brother—I mean Alessandro—a favourite with him?"

"I believe that the mighty Ibrahim loves no man more than Alessandro Francatelli, lady," said the Turk, highly amused by the questions which were put to him, although his manner was respectful and calm.

"Then there is a chance that Alessandro will rise in the service of the Sultan?" continued Flora, naturally anxious to glean all the information she could relative to her brother.

"There is not a more enviable personage in the imperial service than he whom you style Alessandro Francatelli."

"Heaven be thanked that he is so prosperous, poor boy!" exclaimed the aunt, who had been an attentive listener to the preceding discourse. "But your Grand Vizier, signor, must be very powerful to have a great army at his disposal?"

"The Grand Vizier, lady," returned the Ottoman envoy, "is second only to the Sultan—and in him we see a reflection of the imperial Majesty. At a sign from the great and potent Ibrahim, every scimitar throughout this host of twenty thousand men, would leap from its sheath in readiness to strike where and at whom he might choose to order. Nay more, lady—he has the power to gather together armies so numerous that they would inundate Christendom as with a desolating sea. Allah be thanked! there is no limit to the power of the mighty Ibrahim, so long as he holdeth the seals of his great office."

The two females made no farther observation aloud; but they thought profoundly on all they had just heard, for in a short time they were to stand in the presence of this puissant chief whom the Ottomans seemed to worship as a god, and who wielded a power which placed him on a level with the proudest potentate in the Christian world.

In the meantime the little party had entered the precincts of the Ottoman encampment—a complete city of tents and pavilions, ranged in the most admirable order, and with all the regularity of streets.

A solemn silence prevailed throughout the camp, interrupted only by the measured pace and the occasional challenge of sentinels.

At length Flora and her aunt perceived, in the clear moonlight, a pavilion loftier, larger, and more magnificent, than any other which they had yet seen. The pinnacle glittered as if it were tipped with a bright star; the roof was of dazzling whiteness; and the sides were of dark velvet, richly embroidered with gold. It stood in the midst of a wide space, the circumjacent tents forming a complete circle about it. Within this enclosure of tents the sentries were posted at very short intervals; and, instead of walking up and down, they stood motionless as statues, their mighty scimitars gleaming in the moonlight.

In profound silence did the little party proceed towards the entrance of the vast pavilion, which the females had no difficulty in discerning to be the habitation of the potent and dreaded chief into whose presence they were now repairing. In front of this splendid tent floated two large banners, each from the summit of a tall javelin,

the head of which was of burnished gold. One of these enormous flags was green; the other was blood-red. The first was the sacred standard of the Prophet Mahomed, and accompanied the Grand Vizier in his capacity of representative and viceroy of the Sultan; and the latter was the banner which was always planted in front of the pavilion inhabited by the Seraskier, or commander-in-chief of an Ottoman army.

At the entrance of the vast tent stood four mounted sentinels, horses and men alike so motionless that they seemed to be as many equestrian statues.

"In a few moments," whispered the leader of the little escort to the two females, "you will be in the presence of the Grand Vizier, who will receive you alone."

"And Alessandro Fraucatelli?" inquired Flora, in a tone of disappointment: "will he not be there also?"

"Fear not—you shall behold him shortly," answered the Turk; and, passing behind the mounted sentinels, he drew aside a velvet curtain, at the same time bidding Flora and her aunt enter the pavilion.

A blaze of light bursting forth from the interior of the magnificent tent, dazzled and bewildered them, as the Ottoman pushed them gently onward—for they hung back in vague and groundless alarm.

The curtain was instantly closed behind them; and they now found themselves inside the gorgeous abode of the Grand Vizier. The pavilion was decorated in the most sumptuous manner. Crystal chandeliers were suspended to the spars which supported the canvas ceiling; and the pillars which propped up those spars were gilt and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Rich sofas placed around the sides—vases, some containing flowers, others delicious perfumes—tables laden with refreshments of the most exquisite kind,—in a word, all the evidences of enormous wealth and all the accessories of luxurious splendour were displayed in that sumptuous abode.

At the farther end of the pavilion was seated an individual, whom, by the intimation they had already received, and by the magnificence of his attire, Flora and her aunt immediately knew to be the Grand Vizier. He was reclining on a sofa raised on a dais, and apparently in a pensive mood—for his countenance was shaded by his hand.

Slowly and timidly did the two females advance towards the mighty chieftain, whose apparel glittered all over with precious stones. A beautiful plume of feathers, fastened to the front of his turban, by a diamond clasp, waved gracefully above his head; and two rows of precious stones, gleaming resplendently, traced the outlines of his sabre sheath.

But wherefore retained he his hand thus over his countenance? was he unaware of the presence of Flora and her aunt, as noiselessly they advanced upon the thick carpet which was spread over the ground?

And now at length they paused—for they stood within a few yards of the dais on which stood the sofa, or divan, whereon the Vizier reclined.

"Mighty lord," said Flora, in her soft, musical tones, "behold before you the Christian women who are doubtless indebted to the generous intervention of your Highness—"

But she stopped short suddenly;—for Ibrahim raised his head—tears were trickling down his cheeks,—and his countenance—his well-known countenance—was mournful in the extreme.

"Alessandro—my brother Alessandro!" exclaimed Flora, after a pause of a few moments, during which she surveyed him with the most earnest attention, her own features the while expressing indescribable astonishment: then, springing towards him, she cried, "Yes—'tis he, 'tis he!"—and she threw herself into his arms.

Long and fervent was that embrace; and the tears of the brother and sister were commingled—but they were now as much tears of joy as of bitterness—joy on account of this meeting, and bitterness at the renegadism which had invested Ibrahim with that power whereby it was brought about. Nevertheless, long and fervent, we say, was that embrace; and longer it might have been, had not the good aunt also sought her turn to testify her unaltered affection for her nephew.

When the excitement of this affecting scene had somewhat subsided, the Grand Vizier made his relatives sit down, one on either side; and then, in as succinct a manner as possible, he unfolded to them the circumstances of his rapid rise in the Ottoman service, and his proud elevation. Then Flora and her aunt learnt, for the first time, that the Turkish chief whose prisoner Francisco had become at Rhodes, was none other than

Ibrahim himself; and that Demetrius was an agent whom he had despatched to Florence to watch over the interests of his relatives. The Grand Vizier also informed them how he had undertaken this expedition on purpose to rescue them from the persecution of their enemies—how he had rescued Donna Nisida of Riverola from her sojourn on the Island of Snakes—and how he had received information, through the kindness of Fernand Wagner, that Demetrius was playing a perfidious game, which information had induced him to march without delay to Florence.

Flora and her aunt were astonished at the varied and interesting tidings which the Grand Vizier thus imparted to them; but the young maiden's manner was frequently mournful and abstracted while her brother was speaking.

Ibrahim knew full well what was passing in her mind; and he hastened to reassure her, as soon as he had brought his explanations and disclosures to an end.

"Droop not, dearest sister," he said, "nor abandon thyself to melancholy thoughts. It is in my power to render thee completely happy; and it is in accordance with my will to accomplish that aim. Thy misfortunes—thy persecutions, from whatever quarter they come, are at an end; and not a single soul in yon proud city of Florence shall dare to menace my beloved relatives with mischief! No," exclaimed Ibrahim proudly, as he laid his jewelled hand upon that sword-belt which glittered with diamonds worth a monarch's ransom: "no need have you now to fear secret enemies nor diabolical inquisitors! For, were even a breath to threaten you with insult, twenty thousand scimitars should gleam on yonder walls, and the very Duke himself should fall upon his knees to implore your pardon. Yes—ye are both safe; and happiness awaits you!"

Thus speaking, the Grand Vizier clasped his hands together, and a slave entered the pavilion from behind the elevated seat on the dais. Ibrahim asked him a question in a language which his relatives did not comprehend: and he seemed pleased by the reply which the menial gave him. He then issued certain orders, and the slave, after making a low obeisance, withdrew.

"Again I say, dearest Flora," continued the Grand Vizier, pressing his sister's hand affectionately, "abandon not thyself to mournful thoughts. For well—Oh! full well can I divine what is now passing in your mind; and in a few moments you shall see if I have rightly conjectured!"

Flora gazed on him with astonishment; for as yet he had said nothing which led her to believe that he was acquainted with her love for the Count of Riverola.

Her eyes were still fixed upon his countenance, while the blushes were rising to her cheeks; when the curtain behind the dais was once more drawn aside, and an exclamation of joy burst from the lips of him who now entered the pavilion by that means of ingress.

"Francisco!" cried Flora, in an ecstasy of joy; and in another moment the lovers were clasped in each other's arms.

"Dearest aunt," whispered Ibrahim to his relative, "if I have sinned deeply in order to open to myself the avenues which lead to power, thou wilt at least admit that the almost sovereign rank which I enjoy has been of some utility in enabling me to bestow happiness on those whom I love."

"My heart is too full of delightful feelings to permit me to utter a single reproach," returned the good dame, in a similarly subdued tone.

"Oh! my beloved Flora!" exclaimed Francisco; "what marvel—what enchantment has thus brought us together once again?"

"And no more to part, Count of Riverola!" said a voice which caused the young nobleman to turn in amazement towards the speaker.

"Pacha! is it indeed you?" cried Francisco, grasping the hand that was extended to him. "It rejoices me much to meet with thee again, that I may renew my thanks for the kind treatment I experienced from thee in Rhodes. But this is an epoch of miracles and mysteries; for 'tis doubtless to thee that I am indebted for this meeting with one whom I so sincerely love—and yet am I at a loss to conceive wherefore you should manifest such interest in either herself or me. Moreover, methought it was into the presence of the Grand Vizier that I was about to enter."

"And you were rightly informed, my lord," said Ibrahim, laughing; "and as for the miracles and the mysteries whereof you speak, they are readily explained in one word. I am the brother of Flora, whom you love!"

"Great and generous prince, how deeply am I indebted to thee!" exclaimed Francisco. "But one boon I implore—and that is on behalf of my sister Nisida! For when the Ottoman soldiers ere now occupied our mansion, they retained her a prisoner, whereas me they sent under escort hither. I beseech your Highness, then, to send forthwith, and order that my sister be restored to perfect freedom—"

"Fear not that she will be treated unworthily," interrupted Ibrahim. "There is some ground to believe that my sister was consigned to the Carmelite Convent solely on account of the attachment subsisting between your

"Can your Highness suppose that I balance for one moment between the alternatives?" exclaimed Francisco, enthusiastically. "Oh! my lord, the greatest boon you can confer upon me is the hand of your sister! And, much as I love Nisida—deeply as I am attached to her—grateful as I feel for all her goodness towards me—yet I cannot permit her to rule me in a matter so closely regarding my life's happiness as this."

"Flora is yours," said the Grand Vizier: "and may all possible felicity await you both!"

Francisco took the blushing maiden's hand, and pressed it to his lips, while the aunt shed tears of joy.

"LET JUSTICE BE DONE TOWARDS THIS INNOCENT MAN." (See p. 128.)

lordship and herself, and that the Lady Nisida was the authoress of that outrage. The offence is freely forgiven; and if I mention it now, it is but to explain the motives which have prompted me to act as I have done in ordering her ladyship to be watched and guarded for the present. But it depends upon you, my lord, whether she be set free so soon as a messenger can speed, hence to the Riverola palace, or whether she be retained a prisoner for a few hours longer. In a word, 'tis for your lordship to decide at once whether my sister Flora shall remain in Florence as the Countess of Riverola; or whether she shall bid adieu to her native city for ever, and accompany me to Constantinople."

"And now you understand," resumed Ibrahim, "wherefore I have ordered the Lady Nisida to be retained a prisoner in the Riverola palace—that she may not become acquainted with this alliance until it shall be too late to prevent it. It now remains with your lordship to determine how long your sister shall thus be kept under coercion."

"I am too fearful of losing this jewel, through some misfortune as yet unforeseen," said Francisco, taking Flora's hand again, "not to be anxious to secure possession of it as soon as possible. Our union may be celebrated privately and without useless pomp and ceremony: a few hours hence may see us allied to

part no more. I have a friend in Florence—Fernand Wagner—”

“And if he be your friend, Count, you cannot possess one more likely to be sincere,” exclaimed Ibrahim-Pacha.

“He has, indeed, proved a warm friend to me,” continued Francisco. “Two days ago I was stretched upon a bed of sickness—delirious—my mind wandering—reason gone—”

“Merciful heavens!” cried Flora, shuddering from head to foot, and contemplating her intended husband with the deepest solicitude.

“Yes—I was indeed in a desperate state,” said the Count. “But Wagner came—he breathed words of hope in my ears, and I recovered rapidly—so rapidly and so completely that I feel not as if I had ever known indisposition save by name. I was, however, about to observe that there is an oratory in Signor Wagner’s mansion; and there may the holy ceremony be performed. Fernand is moreover well acquainted with the language by which the deaf and dumb communicate their ideas; and through friendship for me, he will break the tidings of my marriage to my sister.”

“Be it as you propose,” said the Grand Vizier; then, after a moment’s pause, he added, speaking in a low and mysterious whisper, “And if you will not shrink from the contact of the renegade at the altar of God—a renegade in name only and not in heart—a renegade to suit his worldly purposes, and not from conviction—then shall I be present at the ceremony. Yes!” he continued, perceiving that his aunt, his sister, and the young Count surveyed him with mingled amazement and pleasure;—yes—in a deep disguise will I quit the encampment and enter Florence; for it would grieve me, grieve me deeply to be excluded from the solemn scene.”

“Dearest, Alessandro—for thus you will permit me still to call you,” exclaimed his aunt, “your words have made my happiness complete. Oh! you are still a Christian in heart—thank God! The Holy Virgin be praised!”

“Not for worlds would I that you should be absent from the ceremony which makes your sister the Countess of Riverola!” exclaimed Francisco.

The arrangements, so happily come to and so amicably digested, were now to be carried into effect. The expectant bridegroom accordingly took a temporary leave of the Grand Vizier, Flora, and the aunt, and returned into the city to seek his friend, Fernand Wagner, it being understood that those whom he had just left should meet him at that signor’s mansion by mid-day.

For the morning was now breaking; and every roof-top in Florence was crowded with persons anxious to obtain a view of the encampment, as we stated at the close of the preceding chapter.

## CHAPTER LXXXIII.

### THE APPROACH OF THE CATASTROPHE.

It was an hour past mid-day; and Nisida was seated at the window of one of the splendid saloons in the Riverola palace—apparently gazing upon the parterres of variegated flowers in the garden beneath, but in reality pondering on the sudden and alarming check which her grand schemes had received by the presence of Ibrahim-Pacha and the Ottoman army before Florence.

For, full well could she divine wherefore she was placed under restraint—wherefore the mansion had been occupied by Turkish guards, and herself kept a prisoner within its walls, while her brother had been hurried away! Moreover, without having positively heard that Flora and her aunt had been released from the dungeons of the Inquisition, she naturally felt certain that this deliverance of the captives would immediately take place, either by fair means or foul; and she could not close her eyes upon the disagreeable fact, nor shut out from her mind the mortifying—nay, the saddening conviction, that the hated Grand Vizier would succeed in effecting an alliance between his sister and the young Count of Riverola!

Yes—how would succeed in his object; and Nisida was powerless! Even were there no guards in the corridors—no sentries beneath the windows—even were she free to quit the mansion at will, what plan could she adopt—what weapon could she wield—what artifice or subtlety would now avail her, to counteract the intentions of one who came with a mighty army at his back?

Tremendous was the rage that filled the soul of Nisida—that proud, haughty, and indomitable soul which rebelled against constraint, as a lioness chafes in her

cage. The flashings of the lady’s brilliant black eyes were terrible—terrible; and could Wagner have beheld her now, he would have fancied that the time must have been a mere dream when he saw those glorious orbs speak the eloquent language of love! Her bosom heaved like the stormy ocean; and she sat, with her hands clasped and her lips compressed—a very Juno in the imposing majesty of her ire!

By innumerable degrees, and without any actual encouragement on her part, a thread of ideas and reminiscences connected with Wagner interwove itself amidst the tangled skein of her thoughts. Her mind appeared to possess the attribute of duality; for while her meditation upon baffled schemes and blasted aims lost no portion of its painful intensity, she also found herself pondering, with a distinctness not impaired by this simultaneousness of two separate trains of thought, on all the pleasure and felicity she had enjoyed on the island with Fernand Wagner!

Her affection for him rapidly revived with all its original ardour; she mentally reviewed every feature of his wondrously handsome countenance—the remembrance of his strange and wild destiny awoke a powerful interest in her bosom—and she was just giving way to an earnest hope of soon meeting him again, when—lo, she suddenly beheld his tall, graceful, and manly form advancing along the path that led through the gardens to the principal entrance of the mansion!

She started from her seat in boundless astonishment and thrilling joy, and waved her hand to bid him quicken his pace.

He saw the signal—he recognised Nisida—and he did hasten his steps: but his heart felt not towards her as enthusiastically as it once had done;—for the conviction that she was cruel and relentless, selfish and vindictive in disposition, was now deeply seated in his mind.

The sentinels at first refused admittance to Fernand Wagner; for they had received positive orders not to allow any one, save her female attendants, to approach Nisida until further instructions should be issued;—but he displayed the signet-ring of the Grand Vizier—and that was a talisman which made the points of scimitars sink towards the ground and heads bow in respectful recognition of the undisputable passport.

In a few minutes Wagner was alone with Nisida.

She threw herself into his arms, and embraced him so fervently—so ardently—so enthusiastically, that she failed to perceive, in the excitement of her soul, that he returned not her caresses with an equal ardour.

“Oh! my beloved Fernand,” she whispered in a tone scarcely audible, “how rejoiced am I that we thus meet again! I have been longing for this happy moment;—but why—oh! why did we ever part? Alas! it was my fault—I left thee—I abandoned thee, for the sake of projects which will now most probably experience complete frustration! Fernand,” she added, in a slower and more solemn tone, as she buried her blushing countenance in his breast, “had I known then that I was in a way to become a mother, I do not believe that I should ever have had the heart or the courage to leave thee!”

“Nisida! is it possible?” said Wagner, also speaking in as low a tone as he could—for he saw that his mistress still maintained the simulation of deafness and dumbness in respect to the world generally; but he was greatly affected at the tidings which had just met his ears—for he was to become a father, and his own fate was as yet involved in such uncertainty that he knew not how soon he might have to surrender up his breath!

“Yes, Fernand,” continued Nisida, hanging to his neck in so loving and tender a manner that he could not repulse her, although he no longer derived pleasure from the contact of that woman of glorious beauty: “in a few months I shall become a mother—and our child must bear its father’s name! I am already wearied of my return to the great world—I long to go back to the Mediterranean isle where we passed so many happy days—and if my dear brother Francisco should escape that snares that are now laid to force him into a marriage which—”

“Nisida,” interrupted Fernand, now gently disengaging himself from her embrace, but taking her hand kindly,—“prepare yourself to receive tidings—”

“Ah! I understand you,” she said abruptly, her entire countenance undergoing a sudden change; and for a moment she seemed as if she were choking;—but subduing her emotions with an amazing effort, she added slowly, as she fixed her flashing eyes upon Wagner, “Francisco is then already united to the hated Flora!”

“Nisida, I implore you to crush this spite—to stifle

this animosity against a young lady who has never done you harm, and whom you should now tutor yourself to love as a sister!" urged the generous-hearted Wagner.

But she whom he thus addressed made no reply:—with her eyes now bent upon the floor, and one hand remaining listlessly in that of Fernand, she was wrapped up in a reverie of the most absorbing nature.

Wagner pressed her hand gently to recall her attention to himself, that he might pursue the theme which he had entered upon; but, suddenly starting, as if some new idea flashed to her mind, Nisida said, in a deep-toned though whispering voice, "When will the bridegroom bring his bride hither?—for that I may expect them soon, I am well convinced!"

"They are even now on their way to the mansion," answered Wagner; "and they are coming alone,—not as the Count and Countess of Riverola should come on such an occasion—but without attendants—without retainers—that they may escape observation—"

"Enough!" said Nisida, in a tone so strange, mysterious, and foreboding, that Fernand surveyed her with curiosity and alarm. "I can well divine wherefore Francisco is bringing hither his bride in such haste," she added, while her countenance assumed an expression awfully fiendish and unearthly in its rancorous hate:—"my brother will fulfil his father's dying injunctions,—and Flora—the detested Flora will view a spectacle, and, if she survive it, receive a warning which will make her repent—bitterly repent her entrance into the family of Riverola! But, come, Fernand—come!—I have no secrets from thee!" she said, in a whisper that hissed snake-like between her half-compressed lips.

It was evident to Wagner that his mistress was labouring under the influence of emotions as terrible as her last words were unintelligible, but—appallingly ominous; and, not knowing how to act—nor what to say,—urged on, too, by some secret influence which prompted him to obey her, but which he could not resist,—he suffered her to lead him hastily away from the apartment.

On they went—through the long corridors and winding passages of the spacious mansion,—past the Turkish sentries, who fell back with a low obeisance as Wagner showed them the signet-ring of the Grand Vizier,—on,—on, until Nisida conducted her companion into a chamber, the door of which she closed behind them.

Fernand started—for it was the one into which, when muffled up in his cloak, he had penetrated a few nights previously; and he knew not why—but he felt that kind of oppressive sensation—that action of a mental presentiment on the physical condition, which serves as a warning to mortals of some grand and important event being at hand!

Nisida observed not that Wagner evinced agitation; for she herself was fearfully excited;—and her eyes seemed to flash fire.

Still retaining his hand firmly locked in her own, she led him behind the thick, ample, and flowing drapery of the couch; and when they were both concealed in that place, she said in a hurried, hollow whisper, "More not, Fernand—remain quiet as the dead,—suspend even your very breathing! For—hark—footsteps approach! Silence—silence—silence!"

And she pressed his hand violently, in the physical convulsiveness of her own awful emphasis.

And Wagner—stupefied, astounded—was motionless as a corpse!

In a few moments the door opened slowly—gave admittance to two persons—and was then closed and locked by one of them.

"Flora, my beloved Flora," said the well-known voice of Francisco, "it is in obedience to the dying commands of my father that I have brought thee hither now—hither into the very chamber where he breathed his last!"

"Francisco, you are pale—very pale!" exclaimed the bride, in a tone tremulous with anxiety. "Oh! what is the meaning of this mysterious visit to the room where his late lordship gave up the ghost?"

"Fear not, my adored bride—for such, thank heaven, you now are," replied Francisco; "but grant me your attention for a few minutes! You are well aware—for it was a matter of common gossip in the household—that you cabinet, whereon my seals are set, has long been closed;—but it is now to be opened by us—by us, who are alone in this chamber together! Tremble not, my beloved: what cause can we have to fear? Doubtless the contents of that cabinet will prove of service to us in some way or another;—for thus spoke my father to me

on his death bed:—'Upon the day of your marriage, whenever such an event may occur, I enjoin you to open the door of that closet. You must be accompanied by your bride—and by no other living soul. I also desire that this may be done with the least possible delay after the matrimonial ceremony, the very day—the very morning—within the very hour after you quit the church. That closet contains the means of elucidating a mystery profoundly connected with me—with you—with the family,—a mystery, the development of which may prove of incalculable service alike to yourself and to her who may share your title and wealth. But should you never marry, then must the closet remain unvisited by you; nor need you trouble yourself concerning the eventual discovery of the secret which it contains, by any persons into whose hands the mansion may fall after your death. It is also my wish that your sister should remain in complete ignorance of the instructions which I am now giving you. Alas! poor girl—she cannot hear the words which fall from my lips; neither shall you communicate their import to her by writing, nor by the language of the fingers. And remember that while I bestow upon you my blessing—my dying blessing—may that blessing become a withering curse—the curse of hell upon you—if in any way you violate one tittle of the injunctions which I have now given you. Thus spoke my father on his death-bed, dearest Flora," added Francisco, in a tone of deep emotion: "the words are impressed on my memory as if they still rang in my ears;—and now we have come to do his bidding!"

"Oh, yes," murmured the Countess-bride, trembling from head to foot; haste thou, my Francisco, to obey your lamented sire's commands—and avoid, oh! avoid the consequence of that withering curse!"

"Thou speakest like one who is as sensible as she is tender and loving," replied Francisco: "and heaven grant that the contents of this mysterious closet may indeed prove of incalculable service to us both!"

The young Count took his charming wife's hand, and led her up to the very door of that mysterious cabinet, the seals of which he hastily broke off;—then, taking the key from the bosom of his doublet, he said, in a tone indicative of the most acute suspense and profound curiosity, "Now, my beloved Flora, for the grand secret!"

At the same moment—impelled by some irresistible influence—Wagner advanced his countenance from behind the hangings of the couch, in such a way that he was enabled to obtain a full view of the mysterious cabinet, the door of which was about to open!

#### CHAPTER LXXIV.

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THE key grated in the lock of the mysterious cabinet—the door was opened—the young Countess of Riverola uttered a dreadful scream, while her husband gave vent to an ejaculation of horror and wild amazement;—for appalling was the spectacle which burst upon their view.

Nor were that scream and that ejaculation the only expressions of fearfully excited emotions which the opening of the closet called forth:—for, at the same instant, a cry of mingled wonder and joy burst from the lips of Fernand Wagner; and, forgetting that he was betraying the presence of Nisida, as well as his own—forgetting all and everything save the prophecy of the Rosicrucian chief and the spectacle now before him—he sprang from behind the curtain—rushed towards the open cabinet—and, falling on his knees, exclaimed triumphantly, "I am saved! I am saved!"

For, behold! in that closet, two bleached and perfect skeletons were suspended to a beam;—and a voice whispered in Wagner's ear, that the spell of the Demon was now broken for ever,—while his inmost soul seemed to sing the canticle of a blessed salvation!

Yes: there—in that cabinet—suspended side by side—were the two skeletons,—horrible—hideous to gaze upon!

It is scarcely possible to convey to the reader an adequate idea of the wild emotions—the conflicting thoughts—and the clashing sentiments, which the dread revelation of that ghastly spectacle suddenly excited in the hearts of the four persons now assembled together—stirring up and agitating terribly all their acutest feelings, as the hurricane, abruptly bursting forth, takes up the withered leaves and scattered straws, and whirls them round and round as if they were in the eddies of the Maelstrom.

Here was Flora clinging to her husband in speechless



horror,—there was Wagner on his knees before the open cabinet: here was Francisco gazing in astonishment on his sister,—and there was Nisida herself, wrapt up in the stupefaction of bewilderment at the conduct of her lover!

But, oh! wondrous—amazing—and almost incredible sight!—what change comes over the person of Fernand Wagner?

There—even there, as he kneels,—and now—even now, as his looks remain bent upon the ghastly skeletons which seem to grin with their fleshless mouths, and to look forth with their eyeless sockets,—yes—even there and even now—is an awful and a frightful change taking place in him whom Nisida loves so well:—for his limbs rapidly lose their vigour, and his form its uprightness—his eyes, bright and gifted with the sight of an eagle, grow dim and failing—the hair disappears from the crown of his head, leaving it completely bald—his brow and his cheeks shrivel up into countless wrinkles—his beard becomes long, flowing, and white as threads of silver—his mouth falls in, brilliant teeth sustaining the lips no more—and with the hollow moan of an old, old man, whose years are verging fast towards a century, the dying Wagner sinks upon the floor!

"Merciful God!" exclaimed Nisida, in a paroxysm of dreadful anguish, mingled with amazement and alarm; then, as if overwhelmed by the blow which the sudden fate of her lover inflicted upon her, she likewise sank down, her heart-strings cracking with burning grief.

For a few moments Francisco and Flora were so astounded by the unsealing of Nisida's lips, that they were riveted to the spot with a stupefaction which rendered them powerless and motionless.

"Take me away from him—bear me hence!" shrieked Nisida, endeavouring to raise herself from the floor, and averting her head with ineffable loathing from the changed form of him whom she had loved so madly. "Bear me hence, I say—Francisco—my brother—take me hence! take me hence!"—then, falling back again, while a ghastly pallor overspread her entire countenance, and her bosom palpitated so violently with her painful gaspings, that it seemed as if the corsage of her dress must burst, she exclaimed, "Holy Virgin! I am dying!"

"Say not so, my beloved sister!" cried Francisco, now springing forward to assist her; while Flora, recovering her self-possession somewhat at the same moment, hastened to aid her husband in raising his wretched sister.

"No—no!" said Nisida, extending her arms to repulse the proffered services of the amiable young Countess, on whom the malignant woman darted glances of burning hate. "Keep off—keep off! Touch me not! I would sooner die here—here," she added, pointing to the immediate vicinity of Wagner, who lay at the point of death on the floor.

Flora fell back, tears streaming down her cheeks—for this demonstration of Nisida's aversion cut her to the very soul. But, as her eyes fell on Wagner, she forgot her own emotions—brushed away her tears—and, kneeling down, supported the head of that old—old man, who was dying rapidly with a smile on his countenance,—a heavenly smile of ineffable hope!

Francisco conveyed his sister to the couch on which their father had breathed his last; and, in a hasty whisper, he intimated his intention of sending for medical assistance.

"No—no," murmured Nisida, seizing him by the hand: "not yet—not yet! You have not yet performed all that yourself and your bride have to fulfil in respect to yon cabinet. Behold—on a little shelf in that closet—there is a manuscript," she added in a faint and tremulous tone;—"tis for you and Flora to read—to study it—together!"

"But you, my dear sister—you, who have so marvelously recovered the faculties of speech and hearing—oh! I must save you," cried Francisco, bending over her, and pressing his lips to her heated brow; "for you are ill—dangerously ill—the shock was too much—"

At that moment Flora uttered a faint scream; Francisco turned his eyes hastily towards her; and a single glance showed him that she was now supporting the head of the lifeless Wagner, as she knelt upon the floor.

Francisco pressed his sister's hand in silent assurance that he would return to her side in a few moments; and he then hastened to raise his horror-stricken bride from her kneeling posture, and to remove her from contact with the corpse.

Leading her to the door, he said in a rapid but tender

manner, "Retire for a short time, my beloved one! God knows how innocent I am of having prepared all these accumulated horrors for our bridal day! Retire and compose yourself, dearest Flora: I will join thee presently!"

"Feel not alarmed on my account—not grieved, my Francisco!" answered his charming wife, in a low and melting tone: "for that old man, who doubtless was a saint in mortal guise, promised us long years of happiness—yes, gave me that assurance with his dying breath, and I believe him!"

She then pressed her husband's hand affectionately, and hurried from the room.

Francisco immediately took his handkerchief, and threw it over the countenance of Fernand Wagner's corpse,—that countenance which still appeared to wear the bland and heavenly smile of a soul filled with sure and certain hope of eternal salvation!

Then, advancing towards the closet, he possessed himself of the manuscript which, as Nisida had declared, lay rolled up on a little shelf; and, having secured it about his person, he hastily shut and locked the door which had revealed so frightful—so appalling a spectacle.

In the meantime Nisida lay, stretched out upon her side, on the couch to which her brother had transported her. She was motionless—but alive:—and she kept her eyes closed that she might the better prevent her thoughts from settling themselves entirely on the dreadful change which had rendered her lover loathsome to her in his last moments. For as she lay in her present position—and being unable, through the sudden paralysis which had seized on her lower extremities, to move herself round—her looks must have fallen on the corpse of Wagner, had she not maintained her eyes shut.

"Nisida—my sister!" said the low and flute-like voice of Francisco, as he bent over her again: "arouse thyself—there is naught now to horrify thee, my sweet sister—I have covered over the face of the departed one;—and, even if I had not, its lineaments are those of a saint, and there is nothing terrible in them!"

The lady opened her large black eyes, the fire of which was already dimmed; and, pressing her hand to her brow as if to collect her thoughts, she appeared to struggle against the numbness and the stupefying influence that had come over her a few moments before, when she lay with her lids closed.

"Francisco," she said at length, removing her hand from her forehead and extending it to him, "I have a boon—a favour to implore of thee; and perchance—if thou wilt grant it—I may yet recover from the dreadful shock which I experienced through the transformation of that man whom I so fondly loved."

"Didst thou then love Fernand Wagner, dearest sister?" asked Francisco, receiving this announcement with unfeigned surprise.

"I loved him madly—passionately!" exclaimed Nisida, her eyes again recovering their wonted fire—but only for a short time. "Of that, however, let me not speak now," she added, her tone suddenly becoming mournful and plaintive. "I said that I required a favour at thy hands—"

"Tis granted already, dear sister, even before the words which explain it pass thy lips!" cried Francisco. "Name thy demand, my beloved Nisida—thou who art, if possible, doubly dear to me, now that the tones of thy sweet voice fall upon my ears!"

"Thou hast not yet fulfilled the wishes of thy father, Francisco," said Nisida, raising her eyes towards him almost in a reproachful manner. "Tis for thee and thy bride to make yourselves, together and at the same time, acquainted with all the mysteries which that dread cabinet was intended to reveal; and this wast thou commanded to do with the least possible delay after thy nuptials. The boon, I crave, then, is that thou wilt at once fulfil the last injunctions of thy departed sire,—here—in this room—and by the side of this bed whereon I am stretched, and where our father breathed his last!"

"Holy Virgin! Nisida," exclaimed Francisco, "wouldst thou have me again open that frightful depository of a horrible mystery—"

"No: I would have thee elucidate that mystery!" interrupted Nisida, her voice becoming stronger with the excitement of her feelings. "Did not our father declare that yourself and your bride must through the medium of that cabinet's contents, learn a secret of value and utility to you both? and did you not swear to obey all his injunctions?"

"That is true—perhaps too true!" said Francisco, mournfully. "And the manuscript—"

"Will reveal your father's meaning!" exclaimed Nisida. "It is penned by his own hand, and contains the sad and shocking narrative of our dear mother's fate!" she ad'ed, suddenly sinking her voice to a low and plaintive whisper. "Go, then, Francisco," she continued, her tone again becoming excited: "fetch hither thy newly-married Flora—fear not that I shall receive her harshly now—for a sacred duty is to be performed, and she must be present!"

"It shall be as you say, Nisida," returned Francisco, after a few moments' profound reflection: "and may the readiness which my amiable bride will manifest in yielding compliance with this requisition—may it, I say, find favour for her in your eyes."

The Count of Riverola then quitted the room;—and the moment the door closed behind him, Nisida's countenance became suddenly animated with an infernal triumph; and, clasping her hands together in the excitement of a savage hope, she murmured to herself, "Now, Flora, shalt thou hear revelations so awful, the narrative of deeds so appalling, that if thy spirit be not crushed, and if thy heart be not broken by the overwhelming details of that accursed history—then art thou indeed worthy to bear the name of Riverola! And now, too, Flora—hated, detested Flora—wilt thou hear the whole of that manuscript whereof thy base curiosity once prompted thee to read a few lines—and those lines of such terrible import!"

Scarcely had Nisida reached this point in her dreadful musings, when Francisco returned, leading into the room his lovely bride, whose countenance was very pale, and who approached the bed with downcast eyes.

"Draw chairs close to the couch, Francisco," said Nisida; "and seat yourselves near me. There! and now prepare, both of ye, to hear the revelation of the most tremendous secret that was ever nourished in the bosom of an Italian family."

Francisco cast a rapid and imploring glance upon Flora,—a glance which besought her to nerve herself with all her courage to endure the disclosure of a mystery which the ominous words of Nisida promised to be very dreadful.

The beauteous bride responded by a look which reassured her anxious husband: and Nisida having made a sign of impatience, Francisco began to read aloud that fearful document, the contents of which will be found in the ensuing chapter.

## CHAPTER LXXV.

### THE MANUSCRIPT.

"In order that you, Francisco—and she who as your bride, shall accompany you on your visit to the secret cabinet wherein you are destined to find this manuscript,—in order, I say, that you may both fully comprehend the meaning of the strange and frightful spectacle thence prepared to meet your eyes, it is necessary that I should enter into a full and perfect detail of certain circumstances, the study of which will I hope prove beneficial to the lady whom you may honour with the proud name of RIVEROLA.

"In the year 1494 I visited Naples on certain pecuniary business, an intimation of which I found amongst the private papers of my father, who had died about ten months previously. I was then just one-and-twenty, and had not as yet experienced the influence of the tender passion. I had found the Florentine ladies so inveterately given to intrigue, and had seen so many instances in which the best and most affectionate of husbands were grossly deceived by their wives, that I had not only conceived an abhorrence at the idea of linking my fortunes with one of my own fellow country-women, but even made a solemn vow that if ever I married, my choice should not fall on a Tuscan. It was with such impressions as these that I quitted Florence on the business to which I have alluded; and I cared not if I never returned thither—so shallow, heartless, and superficial did its gay society appear to me.

"On my arrival at Naples I assumed the name of Cornari, and representing myself as a young man of humble birth and moderate fortunes, mixed in the best society that would receive a stranger of such poor pretensions. I had already learnt at Florence that the fair sex are invariably dazzled by titles and riches, and I had a curiosity to try whether I should be at all sought after when apparently unpossessed of such qualifications. Not that

I had any serious thoughts of matrimony; for indeed I was far from being so romantic as to suppose that any beautiful lady of high birth would fall in love with me so long as I passed as plain *Signor Cornari*. No: it was a mere whim of mine;—would that I had never, never undertaken to gratify it!

"I was altogether unattended by any retinue, having quitted Florence with only a single valet, who died of sudden illness on the road. Thus did I enter Naples alone, with my packages of necessities fastened to the saddle of the steed that bore me. I put up at a small but respectable hostel; and the first few days of my residence in the Neapolitan capital were passed in making inquiries concerning the individual whose large debt to my deceased father had been the principal cause of my journey thither. I found him at length; but perceiving that he was totally unable to liquidate my claim upon him, I did not discover my real name, and took my leave, resolving to think no more of the matter. Returning to the inn, I happened to pass through one of the most squalid and miserable parts of the city, when my attention was suddenly fixed upon the most charming female figure I had ever seen in my life. The object of my interest was respectably but plainly clad: indeed, she appeared to belong to the class of petty tradespeople. Her form was most perfect in its symmetry; her gait was peculiarly graceful, and her manners were evidently modest and reserved—for she looked neither to the right nor to the left, but pursued her way with all the unobtrusiveness of strict propriety. I longed to behold her face; and, quickening my steps, presently passed her. I then had an opportunity of beholding the most beautiful countenance that ever adorned a woman. Heaven seemed to smile through the mirror of her mild black eyes; and there was such an indescribable sweetness in the general expression of her face, that it might have served a limner to copy for the countenance of an angel!

"She saw that I gazed intently upon her, and instantly turned aside into another street; for I should observe that females of the lower orders in Naples are not permitted to wear veils. I stood looking after her until she was lost to my view; and then I went slowly back to the inn, my mind full of the image of the beauteous unknown. Day after day did I rove through that same quarter of the city in the hope of meeting her again; and every evening did I return to my lonely chamber chagrined with disappointment. My spirits sank—my appetite fled—and I grew restless and melancholy. At length I one morning beheld her in the flower-market: and I stood gazing on her with such enthusiastic, and yet respectful admiration, that though she turned away, still methought it was not with resentment. I was transfixed to the spot for some minutes; and it was not until she had disappeared amidst the crowd gathered in that quarter, that I could so far collect my scattered thoughts as to curse my folly for having omitted such an opportunity of accosting her. I however inquired of an old woman, of whom she had purchased some flowers, who she was; but all the information I could glean was that she had recently been in the habit of buying a few flowers every Wednesday of that same old woman. I went away more contented than I had felt for many days; because I now felt certain that I knew where to meet the lovely creature again. Nevertheless, during the six succeeding days I rambled about the flower-market and the squalid quarter of the city where I had first seen her; but my search was unsuccessful—and the greater the disappointment I experienced, the more powerful grew my love. Yes:—it was indeed love which I now felt for the first time, and for a being to whom I had never spoken—whom I had only seen twice, and on each of those occasions but for a few minutes—and whom I knew by her garb to belong to the poorer orders.

"But on the following Wednesday I saw her for the third time; and when she beheld me standing near the old woman's flower-stall, she appeared vexed and surprised, and was about to turn away. I, however, approached her, besought her to accept of the choicest nosegay which I had been able to find, and continued to speak to her in so ardent yet respectful a manner, that she no longer viewed me with resentment, but with something approaching to interest. And if I had been charmed by her beauty when as yet I had seen her at a comparative distance, how enraptured was I now by a nearer contemplation of that heavenly countenance. I assured her that her image had never been absent from my heart since I first saw her—that I should never know happiness again unless she would give me some hope—

and that I would sooner die than have her construe my words into an insult. She was touched by the earnestness and evident sincerity of my manner; and, encouraged somewhat even by her silence, I proceeded hastily to inform her that my name was Cornari—that I was a young man of humble birth—but that I possessed a modest competency, and was my own master. I then pressed her to accept my nosegay; but suddenly bursting into tears, she exclaimed, "Oh, signor, you know not whom you have thus honoured with your notice, and hurried away, leaving me absolutely stupefied with astonishment and grief."

"It immediately struck me that she was a lost and degraded creature who dared not respond to a virtuous love. But a few minutes' reflection told me that such innocence—such artlessness—such candour never could be assumed—never feigned; no—they were most natural! And this conviction, added to the intense curiosity which now inspired me to fathom the mystery of her singular remark, rendered me more anxious than ever to meet with her again. Several weeks passed without seeing the gratification of my wish; and I was becoming seriously ill with disappointment and defeated hope, when accident led me to encounter her once more. She would have avoided me; but I absolutely compelled her to stop. Seizing her hand, I said, 'Look at me—behold to what I am reduced—mark these pale and sunken cheeks—and have pity upon me!' And I, too, she murmured, 'have been very miserable since last we met.'—'Then you have thought of me?' I exclaimed, retaining her hand still in mine, and reading love in the depths of her large dark eyes.—'I have, I have,' she answered bitterly, withdrawing her hand at the same time; then in a tone of deep anguish, she added, 'I implore you to let me proceed on my way; and if you value your own happiness you will never seek me more.'—'But my happiness depends on seeing you often,' I exclaimed; 'and if the offer of an honest heart be acceptable, I have that to give.'—She shuddered dreadfully from head to foot.—'Surely you are not married already?' I said, rendered almost desperate by her strange and incomprehensible manner.—'I married!' she absolutely shrieked forth; then, perceiving that I was perfectly amazed and horrified by the wild vehemence of her ejaculation, she said in a subdued and profoundly melancholy tone, 'I adjure you to think of me no more!'

—'Listen, beautiful stranger,' I exclaimed; 'I love and adore you. My happiness is at stake. Repeat that cruel adjuration, and you inflict a death-blow. If I be loathsome to your sight, tell me so: but leave me not a prey to the most horrible suspense. If you have a father, I will accompany you to him, and make honourable proposals.'—'My father!' she murmured, while her countenance was suddenly swept by a passing expression of anguish so intense that I began to tremble for her reason. I implored her to speak candidly and openly, and not in brief sentences of such ominous mystery. She scarcely appeared to listen to my words, but seemed totally absorbed in the mental contemplation of a deeply seated woe. At length she suddenly turned her large dark eyes upon me, and said in a low, plaintive, profoundly touching tone, 'Signor Cornari, again I adjure you to think of me no more. But, for my own sake, I would not have you believe that unmanly conduct on my part is the cause of the solemn prayer I thus make to you. No, no; I have naught wherewith I can reproach myself: but there are reasons of terrible import that compel me to address you in this manner. Nevertheless,' she added more slowly and hesitatingly, 'if you really should continue to entertain so deep an interest in me as to render you desirous to hear the last explanation from my lips, then you may rely upon meeting me on this spot, and at the same hour, fifteen days hence.'—And she hurried away.

"How that fortnight passed I can scarcely tell. To me it appeared an age. I was deeply—madly enamoured of that strange, beautiful, and apparently conscientious being; and the mystery which involved her threw around her a halo of interest that fanned the flame of my passion. I was prepared to make any sacrifice rather than abandon all hope of calling her my own. The proud title of Riverola was nothing in my estimation when weighed in the balance against her charms—her bewitching manner—her soft, retiring modesty. I moreover flattered myself that I loved her all the more sincerely, because I reflected, that if she gave her heart to me, it would be to the poor and humble Cornari, and not to the rich and mighty Lord of Riverola. At length the day—the memorable day came; and she failed not to keep

her appointment. She was pale—very pale, but exquisitely beautiful; and she smiled in spite of herself when she beheld me. She endeavoured to conceal her emotions; but she could not altogether subdue the evidence of that gratification which my presence caused her. 'You have disregarded my earnest prayer?' she said in a low and agitated tone.—'My happiness depends upon you,' I answered; 'in the name of heaven keep me not in suspense: but tell me, can you and will you be mine?'—'I could be thine, but I dare not,' she replied in a voice scarcely audible.—'Reveal to me the meaning of this strange contradiction, I implore you,' said I, again a prey to the most torturing suspense. 'Do you love another?'—'Did I love another,' she exclaimed, withdrawing her hand which I had taken, 'I should not be here this day.'—'Pardon me,' I cried; 'I would not offend thee for worlds! If you do not love another, can you love me?'—Again she allowed me to take her hand! and this concession, together with the rapid but eloquent glance she threw upon me, was the answer to my question.—'Then, if you can love me,' I urged, 'why cannot you be mine?'—'Because,' she replied in that tone of bitterness which did me harm to hear it, 'you are born of parents whose name and calling you dare mention; whereas you would loathe me as much as you now declare that you love me, were you to learn who my father is! For mother, alas! I have none: she has been dead many, many years.'—And tears streamed down her cheeks. I also wept, so deeply did I sympathize with her.—'Beloved girl,' I exclaimed, 'you wrong me! What is it to me if your father be even the veriest wretch, the greatest criminal that crawls upon the face of the earth, so long as you are pure and innocent?'—'No, no,' she cried hastily, 'you misunderstand me! There breathes not a more upright man than my father!—Then wherefore should I be ashamed to own my marriage with his daughter?' I asked in an impassioned manner.—'Because,' she said, in a tone of such intense anguish that it rent my heart as she began to speak; 'because,' she repeated slowly and emphatically, 'he is viewed with abhorrence by that world which is so unjust; for that which constitutes the awful stigma is an hereditary office in his family—an office that he dares not vacate under pain of death; and now you can too well comprehend that my sire is the PUBLIC EXECUTIONER OF NAPLES!'

"This announcement came upon me like a thunder-bolt. I turned sick at heart—my eyes grew dim—my brain whirled—I staggered, and should have fallen had I not come in contact with a wall. It appeared to me afterwards that sobs of ineffable agony fell upon my ears, while I was yet in a state of semi-stupor— and methought likewise that a delicate, soft hand pressed mine convulsively for a moment. Certain it was that when I recovered my presence of mind,—when I was enabled to collect my scattered thoughts,—the executioner's daughter was no longer near me. I was in despair at the revelation which had been made,—overwhelmed with grief, too, at having suffered her thus to depart—for I feared that I should never see her more. Before me was my hopeless love—behind me, like an evil dream, was the astounding announcement, which still rang in my ears, though breathed in such soft and plaintive tones! Three or four minutes were wasted in the struggles of conflicting thoughts, ere I was sufficiently master of myself to remember that I might still overtake the maiden who had fled from me. It struck me that her father's dwelling must be near the criminal prison; and this was in the squalid quarter of the town where I had first encountered her. Thither I sped—into the dark streets, so perilous after dusk. I plunged: and at length I overtook the object of my affection just as she was skirting the very wall of the prison. I seized her by the hand, and implored her to forgive me for the manner in which I had received the last explanation to which I had urged her.—'It was natural that you should shrink in loathing from the bare idea,' she said in a tone which rent my heart. 'And now leave me, signor; for farther conversation between us is useless.'—'No,' I exclaimed; 'I will not leave you, until I shall have exacted from you a promise that you will be mine! For I could not live without you; and most unjust should I be, most unworthy of the name of a man, if I were to allow a contemptible prejudice to stand in the way of my happiness.'—She returned no answer, but the rapidity of her breathing and the ill-subdued sobs which interrupted her respiration at short intervals, convinced me that a fierce struggle was taking place within her bosom. For it was now quite dark, and I

could not see her face: the hand, however, which I held clasped in my own, trembled violently.—'Beautiful maiden,' I said after a long pause, 'wherefore do you not reply to me? Were I the proudest peer in Christendom, I would sacrifice every consideration of rank and family for your sake. What more can man say? What more can he do?'—'Signor Cornari,' she answered at length, 'prudence tells me to fly from you; but my heart prompts me to remain. Alas! I feel that the latter feeling is dominant within me!'—'And you will be mine?' I demanded eagerly.—'Thine for ever!' she murmured, her head sinking upon my breast.

"But I shall not dwell unnecessarily upon this portion of my narrative. Suffice it to say that we parted, having arranged another meeting for the next evening. It was on this occasion that I said to her, 'Vitagela, I have thought profoundly upon all that passed between us yesterday; and I am more than ever determined to make you my wife. Let us away to your father, and demand his consent to our union.'—'Stay,' she said, in an emphatic tone; 'and hear me patiently ere you either renew the promise to wed me or reiterate your desire to seek my father. You must know,' she continued, while I listened with painful suspense, 'that my father will not oppose a step in which his daughter's happiness is involved. But the very moment that sees our hands joined will behold the registry of the marriage in the great book kept by the Lieutenant of Police; and thereby will be constituted a record of the name of one who, if need be, must assume the functions of that office which my sire now fills!'—'What mean you, Vitangela?' I demanded, horrified by the dim yet ominous significance of these words.—'I mean,' she continued, 'that the terrible post of Public Executioner must remain in our family as long as this family shall exist; and that those who form marriages with us are considered to enter into the family. When my father dies, my brother will succeed him; but should my brother die without having a son old enough to take his place, you, signor, if you become my husband, will be forced to assume the terrible office.'—'But I am not a Neapolitan,' I exclaimed: 'and I should hope that when we are united, you will not insist upon dwelling in Naples.'—'I would give worlds to leave this odious city,' she said, emphatically.—'Nothing detains me here another day, nor another hour,' I cried: 'let the priest unite our hands, and we forthwith set off for Florence. But why should not our marriage take place privately, unknown even to your father? and in that case no entry need be made in the books of the Lieutenant of Police.'—'You have expressed that desire which I myself feared to utter, lest you should think it unmaidenly,' she murmured.—'For your sake I will quit home and kindred without farther hesitation.'—I was rejoiced at this proof of affection and confidence on her part; and it was arranged between us that we should be married on the ensuing evening, and in the most private way possible. Before we parted, however, I drew from her a solemn pledge that, when once she should have become my wife, she would never even allude to her family—that she would not communicate to them the name of her husband nor the place of our abode under any circumstances,—in a word, that she would consider her father and her brother as dead to her. With streaming eyes and sobbing breast, she gave me the sacred promise I required, ratifying it with an oath which I made her repeat to my dictation.

"On the ensuing evening Vitangela met me according to the appointment: and it was then that I revealed to her my real name and rank. 'Dearest girl,' I said, 'you gave me your heart, believing me to be a poor and humble individual; and you have consented to abandon home and kindred for my sake. Profoundly, then, do I rejoice that it is in my power to elevate you to a position of which your beauty, your amiability, and your virtue render you so eminently worthy; and in my own native Florence, no lady will be more courted, nor treated with greater distinction than the Countess of Riverola.'—She uttered an exclamation of mingled astonishment and sorrow, and would have fallen to the ground had I not supported her.—'Oh!' she murmured, 'I should have been happier were you indeed the humble and the poor Signor Cornari!'—'No: think not thus,' I urged: 'wealth and rank are two powerful aids to happiness in this life. But at all events, beloved Vitangela, you now recognise more than ever the paramount necessity which exists to induce you to maintain inviolate your solemn vow of yesterday.'—'I require no such inducement to compel me to keep that pledge,' she answered. 'Think not that I will bring disgrace on the name, whether

humble or lofty, with which you have proposed to honour me! Oh! no—never, never!'

"I embraced her fondly; and we proceeded to the dwelling of a priest, by whom our hands were united in the oratory attached to his abode. At daybreak we quitted Naples; and in due time we reached Florence, where my bride was received with enthusiastic welcome by all the friends of the Riverola family. My happiness appeared to have been established on a solid foundation by this alliance; and the birth of Nisida in 1495—just to unite our hearts more closely, if possible. Indeed, I can safely assert that not a harsh word ever passed between us, nor did aught occur to mar our complete felicity for some years after our union. But in 1500 a circumstance took place which proved to be the first link in a chain of incidents destined to wield an important influence over my happiness.

"It was in the month of April, of that year—Oh! how indelibly is the detested date fixed on my memory—that Duke Piero de Medici gave a grand entertainment to all the aristocracy of Florence. The banquet was of the most splendid description, and the gardens of the palace were brilliantly illuminated. The days of Lorenzo the Magnificent seemed to have been revived for a short period by his degenerate descendant. All the beauty and rank of the Republic were assembled at this festival; but no lady was more admired for the chaste elegance of her attire, the modest dignity of her deportment, and the loveliness of her person than Vitangela, Countess of Riverola. After the banquet, the company proceeded to the gardens, where bands of music were stationed; and while some indulged in the exhilarating dance, others sauntered through the brilliantly lighted avenues. I need scarcely inform you that no husband, unless he were anxious to draw down upon himself the ridicule which attaches itself to extreme uxoriousness, would remain linked to his wife's side all the evening at such an entertainment as the one of which I am speaking. I was therefore separated from the Countess, who was left in an arbour with some other ladies, while I joined the group which had assembled around the Prince. I know not exactly how it was that I happened to quit my companions, after a lively conversation which had probably lasted about an hour: certain, however, it is that towards midnight I was proceeding alone down a long avenue in which utter darkness reigned, but outside of which the illuminations shone brilliantly. Suddenly I heard voices near me; and one of them appeared to be that of the Countess of Riverola—but they were speaking in so subdued a tone that I was by no means confident in my suspicion. The voices approached; and a sentiment of curiosity, unaccountable at the time, as I believed Vitangela to be purely itself, impelled me to listen attentively. To conceal myself was not necessary; I had but to remain perfectly still for my presence to be unknown, utter darkness prevailing in the avenue.

"The persons who were conversing advanced. 'You know,' said the soft and whispering voice which I believed to be that of the Countess, 'you know how sincerely, how tenderly I love you; and what a frightful risk I run in even thus according to a few moments' private discourse?'—The voice of a man gave some reply, the words of which did not reach my ears: then the pair stopped, and I heard the billing sound of kisses. Oh! how my blood boiled in my veins! I grasped the handle of my sword;—but I was nailed to the spot—my state of mind was such that though I longed—I thirsted for immediate vengeance, yet I was powerless—motionless—paralyzed. To the sounds of kisses succeeded those of sobbing and of grief on the part of the lady whose voice had produced such a terrible effect upon me. 'Holy Virgin! I thought; 'she deplores the fate that chains her to her husband; she weeps because she has not the courage to fly with her lover!'—and now I experienced just the same sensations as those which stunned and stupefied me on that evening at Naples when I first heard that Vitangela was the daughter of the Public Executioner. Several minutes must have passed while I was in this condition of comparative insensibility—or rather while I was a prey to the stunning conviction that I was deceived by her whom I had loved so well and deemed so pure!

"When I awoke from that dread stupor all was still in the dark avenue—not a footstep, not a whispering voice was heard. I hurried along amidst the trees, my soul racked with the cruellest suspicions. And yet I was not confident that it was positively my wife's voice that I had

heard; and the more I pondered upon the circumstance the more anxious was I to arrive at the conviction that I had indeed been deceived by some voice closely resembling hers. I accordingly hurried back to the arbour where I had last seen her in the company of several Florentine ladies. Joy animated my soul when I beheld Vitangela seated in that arbour, and in the very spot too where I had beheld her upwards of an hour previously. But she was now alone. "Where are your friends?" I asked, in a kind tone, as I approached and took her hand. "Indeed I know not," she replied, casting a hurried glance around, and now appearing surprised to find that there was not another lady near her. She seemed confused—and I also observed that she had been weeping very recently. The joy which had for a moment animated me was now succeeded by a sudden chill that went to my heart death-like—icy. But, subduing my emotion, I said, "Your ladyship has not surely remained here ever since I last saw you, more than an hour?"—"Yes," she responded, without daring to raise her eyes to meet mine,—"I knew that she lied, most foully lied; her confusion—her whole manner betrayed her. But I exercised a powerful mastery over my mind: the suspicion which I had all along entertained was strengthened greatly, but not altogether confirmed—and I resolved to wait for confirmation ere I allowed my vengeance to burst forth. Moreover, it was necessary to discover who the gallant might be,—the favoured one who had superseded me in the affections of Vitangela! I, however, promised myself that when once my information was complete, my revenge should be terrible;—and this resolution served as a solace for the moment, and as an inducement for me to conceal alike the suspicions I had imbibed and the dreadful pain they had caused me. Presenting my hand, therefore, to Vitangela, I escorted her to that part of the grounds where the company were now assembled, and where I hoped that some accident might make known to me the person of the gallant with whom she had walked in the avenue. Anxiously, but unsuspectingly, did I watch the manner of the Countess every time she returned the salutation of the various nobles and cavaliers whom we encountered in our walk: but not a blush—not a sign of confusion on her part—not one rapidly dealt but significant glance afforded me the clue which I sought. And yet it struck me that she often cast furtive and uneasy, or rather searching looks hither and thither, as if to seek and single out some one individual amidst the multitudes moving about the illuminated gardens. She was certainly preoccupied and mournful: but I affected not to observe that a cloud hung over her spirits; and, in order to throw her completely off her guard, I talked and laughed as gaily as was my wont.

"To be brief, the festivities terminated a little before sunrise; and I conducted the Countess back to our mansion.

"From that night forth I maintained the strictest watch upon her conduct and proceedings: I appointed Margaretha, the mother of my page Antonio, to act the spy upon her;—but weeks and months passed, and nothing transpired to confirm the terrible suspicion that haunted me night and day. I strove to banish that suspicion from my mind—heaven knows how hard I struggled to crush it. But it was immortal—and it beset me as if it were the ghost of some victim whom I had ruthlessly murdered. Vitangela saw that my manner had somewhat altered towards her; and she frequently questioned me on the subject. I, however, gave her evasive replies; for I should have been ashamed to acknowledge my suspicion if it were false, and it was only by keeping her off her guard that I should ever receive confirmation of it if it were true. Thus nearly nine months passed away from the date of the dual banquet: and then you, Francisco, were born.

"The presence of an heir to my name and wealth was the subject of much congratulation on the part of my friends; but to me it was a source of torturing doubts and racking fears. You never bore the least—no, not the least resemblance, either physical or mental, to me; whereas the very reverse was the case with Nisida, even in her infancy. From the moment of your birth—from the first instant that I beheld you in the nurse's arms,—the most agonizing feelings took possession of my soul. Were you indeed my son?—or were you a pledge of adulterous love? Merciful heavens! in remembering all I suffered when those terrible thoughts oppressed me, I wonder that you, Francisco, should now be alive—that I did not strangle you as you lay in your cradle. And, O God! how dearly I could have loved you, Francisco, had I felt the same confidence in my paternity as in that of

your sister Nisida! But, no—all was at least doubt and uncertainty in that respect;—and, as your cast of features and physical characteristics developed themselves, that hideous doubt and that racking uncertainty increased until there were times when I was nearly goaded to do some desperate deed. Those mild blue eyes—that rich brown hair—that feminine softness of expression which marked your face—oh! those belonged not to the family of Riverola!

"Time wore on—and my unhappiness increased. I suspected my wife, yet dared not proclaim the suspicion. I sought to give her back my love—but was utterly unable to subdue the dark thoughts and crush the maddening uncertainties that agitated my soul. At last I was sinking into a state of morbid melancholy, when an incident occurred which revived all the energies of my mind. It was in 1505—Nisida being then ten years old, and you, Francisco, four—when Margaretha one evening informed me that the Countess had received a letter which had thrown her into a state of considerable agitation, and which she had immediately burnt. By questioning the porter at the gate of the mansion, I learnt that the person who delivered the letter was a tall, handsome man, of about thirty-two, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a somewhat feminine expression of countenance. Holy Virgin! this must be the gallant—the paramour of my wife—the father of the boy on whom the law compelled me to bestow my own name! Such were the ideas which immediately struck me; and I now prepared for vengeance—deadly vengeance. Margaretha watched my wife narrowly; and, on the evening following the one on which the letter had been delivered, Vitangela was seen to secure a heavy bag of gold about her person, and quit the mansion by the secret staircase of her apartment—that apartment which is now the sleeping chamber of your sister Nisida. Margaretha followed the Countess to an obscure street, at the corner of which the guilty woman encountered a tall person, enveloped in a cloak, and who was evidently waiting for her. To him she gave the bag of gold; and they embraced each other tenderly. They then separated—the Countess returning home, unconscious that a spy watched her movements.

"Margaretha reported all that had occurred to me; and I bade her redouble her attention in watching her mistress. Now that the lover is once more in Florence, I thought, and well provided with my gold to pursue his extravagances, there will soon be another meeting—and then for vengeance—such a vengeance as an Italian must have! But weeks and months again passed without affording the opportunity which I craved: yet I knew that the day must come—and I could tutor myself to await its arrival, if not with patience, at least with so much outward composure as to lull the Countess into a belief of perfect security. Yes—weeks and months,—aye, and years too: and still I nursed my hopes and projects of vengeance, the craving for which increased with the lapse of time!

"And now I come to the grand—the terrible—the main incident in this narrative. It was late one night, in the month of January, 1510—Nisida being then fifteen, and you, Francisco, nine—that Margaretha came to me in my own apartment, and informed me that she had seen the tall gallant traverse the garden hastily, and obtain admission to the Countess's chamber by means of the secret staircase. The hour for vengeance had at length come! Margaretha was instantly despatched to advertise two bravoes, whose services I had long secured for the occasion, that the moment had arrived when they were to do the work for which they had been so well paid in advance, and by the faithful performance of which they would still farther enrich themselves. Within half-an-hour all the arrangements were completed: Margaretha had retired to her own chamber—and the bravoes were concealed with me in the garden. Nor had we long to wait. The private door opened shortly: and two persons appeared on the threshold. The night was clear and beautiful—and, from my hiding-place, I could discern the fondness of the embrace that marked their parting. And they parted, too, never to meet again in life! Vitangela closed the door—and her lover was passing rapidly along amidst the trees in the garden, when a dagger suddenly drank his heart's blood. That dagger was mine, and wielded by my hand!

"He fell without a groan—dead, stone-dead at my feet. Half of my vengeance was now accomplished: the other half was yet to be consummated. Without a moment's unnecessary delay the corpse was conveyed to a cellar beneath the northern wing of the mansion; and the two bravoes then hastened to Vitangela's chamber, into

which they obtained admission by forcing the door of the private staircase. In pursuance of the orders which they had received from me, they bound and gagged her: and they conveyed her through the garden to the very cellar where, by the light of a gloomy lamp, she beheld her husband close by a corpse! 'Bring her near!' I exclaimed, unmoved by the looks of indescribable horror which she threw around;—but when her eyes caught sight of the countenance of that lifeless being, they remained fixed with frenzied wildness in their sockets—and even if there had been no gag between her teeth, I do not believe that she could have uttered a syllable.

"And now commenced the second act in this appalling

form so loved by thee! Now hack away at the countenance—deface that beauty—pick out those mild blue eyes!"—and I laughed madly—madly! The Countess fainted, and I ordered her to be carried back to her apartment, where Margaretha was already waiting to receive her. Indeed, I had naturally foreseen that insensibility would result from the appalling spectacle which I compelled Vitangela to witness, and Margaretha was prepared to breathe dreadful menaces in her ear the moment she should recover,—menaces of death to herself and both her children if she should ever dare to reveal, even to her father confessor, one tittle of the scene which had that night been enacted!

"APPALLING WAS THE SPECTACLE WHICH BURST UPON THEIR VIEW." (See p. 139.)

tragedy! While one of the braves held the Countess in his iron grasp, in such a manner that she could not avert her head, the other, who had once been a surgeon, tore away the garments from the corpse and commenced the task which I had beforehand assigned to him. And as the merciless scalpel hacked and hewed away at the still almost palpitating flesh of the murdered man, in whose breast the dagger remained deeply buried,—a ferocious joy—a savage hyena-like triumph filled my soul; and I experienced no remorse for the deed I had done! Far—very far from that;—for as the work progressed, I exclaimed, 'Behold, Vitangela, how the scalpel hews that

"The surgeon-brave did his work bravely; and the man who had dishonoured me was reduced to naught save a skeleton! The flesh and the garments were buried deep in the cellar: the skeleton was conveyed to my own chamber, and suspended to a closet where you, Francisco, and your bride are destined to behold it—along with another! My vengeance was thus far gratified—the braves were dismissed—and I locked myself up in my chamber for several days, to brood upon all I had done, and occasionally to feast my eyes with the grim remains of him who had dared to love my wife. During these days of seclusion I would see no one save the servant



who brought me my meals. From him I learnt that the Countess was dangerously ill—that she was indeed dying, and that she besought me to visit her, if only for a moment. But I refused—implacably refused! I was convinced that she craved my forgiveness; and that I could not give. Dr. Duras, who attended upon her, came to the door of my chamber, and implored me to grant him an interview:—then Nisida besought a similar boon:—but I was deaf to each and all! Yes—for there was still a being on whom I yet longed to wreak my vengeance;—and that being was yourself, Francisco! I looked upon you as the living evidence of my dishonour—the memorial of your mother's senseless guilt! But I recoiled in horror from the idea of staining my hands with the blood of a little child—yet I felt that if I came near you—if I saw you clinging affectionately to Vitangela—if I heard you innocently and unconsciously mock me by calling me 'Father!'—Oh! I felt that I should be unable to restrain the fury of my wrath!

"I know not how long I should have remained in the seclusion of my own chamber—perhaps weeks and months: but one morning, shortly after day-break, I was informed by the only servant whom I would admit near me, that the Countess had breathed her last during the night, and that Nisida was so deeply affected by her mother's death, that she—poor girl!—was dangerously ill. Then I became frantic on account of my daughter; and I quitted my apartment, not only to see that proper aid was administered to her, but to complete the scheme of vengeance which I had originally formed. Thus, in the first place, Dr. Duras was enjoined to take up his abode altogether in the Riverola palace, so long as Nisida should require his services!—and, on the other hand, a splendid funeral was ordered for the Countess of Riverola. But Vitangela's remains went not in the velvet-covered coffin to the family vault:—no—her flesh was buried in the same soil where rotted the flesh of her paramour—and her skeleton was suspended to the same beam to which his bones had been already hung! For I thought, within myself, 'This is the first time that the wife of a Count of Riverola has ever brought dishonour and disgrace upon her husband: and I will take care that it shall be the last. To Nisida will I leave all my estates—all my wealth, save a miserable pittance as a provision for the bastard Francisco. She shall inherit the title; and the man on whom she may confer her hand, shall be the next Count of Riverola. Their wedding-day shall be marked by a revelation of the mystery of this cabinet; and the awful spectacle will teach him, whoever he may be, to watch his wife narrowly—and will teach her what it is to prove unfaithful to a fond husband! To both the lesson will be as useful as the manner of conveying it will be frightful; and they will hand down the tradition to future scions of the family of Riverola! Francisco, too, shall learn the secrets of this cabinet;—he shall be taught why he has been disinherited—why I have hated him; and thus even from the other world shall the spirits of the vile paramour and the adulterous wife behold the consequences of their crime perpetuated in this!'

"Such were my thoughts—such were my intentions. But an appalling calamity forced me to change my views. Nisida, after a long and painful illness, became deaf and dumb; and Dr. Duras gave me no hope of the restoration of her lost faculties. Terrible visitation! Then was it that I reasoned with myself—that I deliberated long and earnestly upon the course which I should pursue. It was improbable that, afflicted as Nisida was, she would ever marry; and I felt grieved—deeply grieved to think that you, Francisco, being disinherited, and Nisida remaining single, the proud title of Riverola would become extinct! I therefore resolved on the less painful alternative of sacrificing my intention of disinheriting you altogether; and I accordingly made a will by which I left you the estates, with the contingent title of Count of Riverola, under certain conditions which might alienate both property and rank from you, and endow therewith your sister Nisida. For should she recover the faculties of speech and hearing by the time she shall have attained the age of even thirty-six, she will yet be marriageable and may have issue: but should that era in her life pass, and still see her deaf and dumb, all hope of her recovery will be dead. Thus, if she be still so deeply afflicted at that age, you, Francisco, will inherit the vast estates and the lordly title which, through the circumstances of your birth, it grieves me to believe will ever devolve upon you!

"Such were my motives for making that will which you are destined to hear read, doubtless, before the time comes for you to peruse this manuscript. And having

made that will, and experiencing the sad certainty that my unfortunate daughter will never become qualified to inherit my fortune and title, but that the name of Riverola must be perpetuated through your marriage, I have determined that to you and your bride alone, shall the dread secrets of the cabinet be revealed!"

Thus terminated the manuscript.

## CHAPTER LXXVI.

### NISIDA'S EXPLANATIONS.

POWERFUL in meaning and strong in expression as the English language may be rendered by one who has the least experience in the proper combination of words, yet it becomes totally inadequate to the task of conveying an idea of those feelings—those harrowing emotions—those horrifying sentiments, which were excited in the breasts of Francisco di Riverola and his beautiful Countess, Flora, by the revelations of the manuscript.

At first the document begot a deep and mournful interest, as it related the interviews of the late Count with Vitangela in the streets of Naples: then amazement was engendered by the announcement of that lovely and unhappy being's ignominious parentage;—but a calmness was diffused through the minds of Francisco and Flora, as if they had found a resting-place amidst the exciting incidents of the narrative, when they reached that part which mentioned the marriage.

Their feelings were, however, destined to be speedily and most painfully wrung once more; and Francisco could scarcely restrain his indignation—yes, his indignation even against the memory of his deceased father—when he perused those injurious suspicions which were recorded in reference to the honour of his mother. Though unable to explain the mystery in which all that part of the narrative was involved, yet he felt firmly convinced that his mother was innocent; and he frequently interrupted himself in the perusal of the manuscript to give utterance to passionate ejaculations expressive of that opinion.

But it was when the hideous tragedy rapidly developed itself, and the history of the presence of the two skeletons in the closet was detailed,—it was then that language becomes powerless to describe the mingled wrath and disgust which Francisco felt, or to delineate the emotions of boundless horror and wild amazement that were excited in the bosom of his Flora. In spasmodic shuddering did the young Countess cling to her husband when she learnt how fearfully accurate was the manner in which the few lines of the manuscript which she had read many months previously in Nisida's boudoir fitted in with the text,—and how appalling was the tale which the whole made up! She was cruelly shocked—and her heart bled for that fine young man whom she was proud to call her husband, but whom his late father had loathed to recognise as a son!

And Nisida—what were her feelings as she lay stretched upon the couch, listening to the contents of the manuscript which she had read before? At first one hope—one idea was dominant in her soul,—the hope that Flora would be crushed even to death by the revelations which were indeed almost sufficient to overwhelm a gentle disposition and freeze the vital current in the tender and compassionate heart. But as Francisco read on, and when he came to those passages which described the sufferings and the cruel fate of his mother, then Nisida became a prey to the most torturing feelings—dreadful emotions were expressed by her convulsing countenance and wildly glaring eyes—and she muttered deep and bitter anathemas against the memory of her own father! For well does the reader know that she had loved her mother to distraction; and thus the horrifying detail of the injuries heaped upon the head and on the name of that revered parent, aroused all the fiercest passions of rage and hate, as completely as if that history had been new to her, and as if she were now becoming acquainted with it for the first time.

Indeed, so powerful—so terrible was the effect produced by the revival of all those dread reminiscences and heartrending emotions on the part of Nisida, that, forgetting her malignant spite and her infernal hope with regard to Flora, she threw her whole soul into the subject of the manuscript; and the torrent of feelings to which she thus gave way, was crushing and overwhelming to a woman of such fierce passions, and who had received so awful a shock as that which had stretched her on the couch where she now lay. For the fate of him whom she had loved with such ardour, and the re-

vulsion that her affections experienced on account of the ghastly spectacle which Wagner had presented to her view in his dying moments,—the disgust and loathing which had been inspired in her mind by the thought that she had ever fondled that being in her arms and absolutely doted on the almost superhuman beauty which had changed to such revolting ugliness,—it was all this that had struck her down—paralysed her—inflicted a mortal, though not an instantaneous blow, upon that woman lately so full of energy, so strong in moral courage, and so full of vigorous health!

Thus, impressed with the conviction that her end was approaching, the moment the perusal of the manuscript was concluded, the Lady Nisida said in a faint and dying tone, "Francisco, draw near—as near as possible—and listen to what I have now to communicate; for it is in my power to clear up all doubt—all mystery relative to the honour of our sainted mother, and to convince thee that no stigma attaches itself to thy birth!"

"Alas! my beloved sister," exclaimed the young Count, "you speak in a faint voice—you are very ill! In the name of the Holy Virgin! I conjure you to allow me to send for Dr. Duras!"

"No, Francisco," said Nisida, her voice recovering somewhat of its power as she continued to address her brother: "I implore you to let me have my own way—to follow my own inclinations! Do not thwart me, Francisco; already I feel as if molten lead were pouring through my brain—and a tremendous weight lies upon my heart! Forbear, then, from irritating me, my well-beloved Francisco—"

"Oh! Nisida," cried the young Count, throwing his arms round his sister's neck and embracing her fondly: "if you love me now—if you have ever loved me, grant me one boon! By the memory of our sainted mother I implore you—by your affection for her I adjure you, Nisida—"

"Speak—speak, Francisco," interrupted his sister, hastily: "I can almost divine the nature of the boon you crave—and my God!" she added, tears starting from her eyes, as a painful thought flashed across her brain,—“perhaps I have been too harsh—too severe! At all events, it is not now—on my death-bed—"

"Your death-bed!" echoed Francisco, in a tone indicative of acute anguish, while the sobs which convulsed the bosom of the young Countess were heard alike by him and his sister.

"Yes, dearest brother—I am dying!" said Nisida, in a voice of profound but mournful conviction: "and therefore let me not delay those duties and those explanations which can alone unburden my heart of the weight that lies upon it! And first, Francisco, be thy boon granted—for I know that thou wouldst speak to me of her who is now thy bride. Come to my arms, then, Flora—embrace me as a sister—and forgive me, if thou canst,—for I have been a fierce and unrelenting enemy to thee!"

"Oh! let the past be forgotten, my friend—my sister!" exclaimed the weeping Flora, as she threw herself into Nisida's outstretched arms.

And the young wife and the dying woman embraced each other tenderly—for deep regrets and pungent remorse at last attuned the mind of Nisida to sweet and holy sympathy!

"And now," said Nisida, "sit down by my side, and listen to the explanations which I have promised. Give me your hand, Flora—dear Flora: let me retain it in mine—for at the last hour, and when I am about to leave this fair and beautiful earth, I feel an ardent longing to love those who walk upon its face, and to be loved by them in return. But, alas—alas!" she added, somewhat bitterly; "reflections and yearnings of this nature come too late! O Flora! the picture of life is spread before you—while from me it is rapidly receding and dissolving into the past. Like our own fair city of palaces and flowers, when seen from a distance beneath the glorious lights of morning, may that picture continue to appear to thee:—and mayst thou never draw near enough to recognise the false splendours in which gorgeous hues may deck the things of this world,—mayst thou never be brought so close to the sad realities of existence, as to be forced to contemplate the breaking hearts that dwell in palaces, or to view in disgust the slime upon flowers!"

"Nisida," said Francisco, bending over his sister and speaking in a voice indicative of deep emotion, "the kind words you utter to my beloved Flora shall ever remain engraven upon my heart."

"And on mine also," murmured the young Countess,

pressing Nisida's hand with grateful ardour, while her eyes, radiant with very softness, threw a glance of passionate tenderness upon her generous-hearted and handsome husband.

"Listen to me," resumed Nisida, after a short pause, during which she gave way to all the luxury of those sweet and holy reflections which the present scene engendered;—and these were the happiest moments of the lady's stormy life! "Listen to me," she repeated; "and let me enter upon and make an end of my explanations as speedily as possible. And, first, Francisco, relative to our sainted—our innocent—our deeply-wronged and much injured mother! You have already learnt that she was the daughter of the Public Executioner of Naples; and you have heard that ere she became our father's wife, she swore a solemn oath; she pledged herself in the most sacred manner, that she would never even allude to her family—that she would not communicate to them the name of her husband nor the place of his abode, under any circumstances—in a word, that she would consider her father and her brother as dead to her! And yet she had a tender heart; and after she became the Countess of Riverola, she often thought of that parent who had reared her tenderly and loved her affectionately; she thought also of her brother Eugenio, who had ever been so devoted to his sister. But she kept her promise faithfully for five years, until that fatal date of April, 1500, which our father has so emphatically mentioned in his narrative. It was in the gardens belonging to the ducal palace, that she suddenly encountered her brother Eugenio—"

"Her brother!" ejaculated Francisco, joyfully: "oh! I knew—I felt certain that she was innocent!"

"Yes—she was indeed innocent," repeated Nisida. "But let me pursue my explanations as succinctly as possible. It appeared that the old man—the Executioner of Naples—was no more; and Eugenio, possessing himself of the hoardings of his deceased father, had fled from his native city to avoid the dread necessity of assuming the abhorrent office. Accident led the young adventurer to Florence in search of a more agreeable employment as a means whereby to earn his livelihood; and, having formed the acquaintance of one of the Duke's valets, he obtained admittance to the gardens on that memorable evening when the grand entertainment was given. In spite of the strict injunctions which he had received not to approach the places occupied by the distinguished guests, he drew near the arbour in which our mother had been conversing with other ladies, but where she was at that moment alone. The recognition was immediate; and they flew into each other's arms. It would have been useless, as well as unnatural, for our mother to have refused to reveal her rank and name: her brilliant attire was sufficient to convince her brother that the former was high—and inquiry would speedily have made him acquainted with the latter. She accordingly drew him apart, into a secluded walk, and told him all: but she implored him to quit Florence without delay; and she gave him her purse and one of her rich bracelets, thereby placing ample resources at his disposal. Five years passed away—and during that period she heard no more of her brother Eugenio. But at the expiration of the interval, she received a note stating that he was again in Florence—that necessity had alone brought him thither—and that he would be at a particular place, at a certain hour, to meet either herself or any confidential person whom she might instruct to see him. Our mother filled a bag with gold, and put into it some of her choicest jewels; and, thus provided, she repaired in person to the place of appointment. It grieved her—deeply grieved her generous heart thus to be compelled to meet her brother secretly, as if he were a common robber or a midnight bravo: but for her husband's peace, and in obedience to the spirit of the oath which imperious circumstances had alone led her in some degree to violate, she was forced to adopt that sad and humiliating alternative!"

"Alas—poor mother!" sobbed Francisco, deeply affected by this narrative.

"Again did five years elapse without bringing tidings to our mother of Eugenio," continued Nisida; "and then he once more set foot in Florence. The world had not used him well—Fortune had frowned upon him—and though a young man of fine spirit and noble disposition, he failed in all his endeavours to carve out a successful career for himself. Our mother determined to accord him an interview in her own apartment. She longed to converse with him at her ease—to hear his tale from his own lips—to sympathise with and console him. Oh!

who could blame her if in so doing she departed from the strict and literal meaning of that vow which had bound her to consider her relations as dead to her? But the fault—if fault it were—was so venial, that to justify it is to invest it with an importance which it would not have possessed save for the frightful results to which it led. You have already heard how foully he was waylaid—how ruthlessly he was murdered! Holy Virgin! my brain whirls when I reflect upon that hideous cruelty which made our mother the spectatress of his dissection: for, even had he been a lover—even were she guilty—even if the suspicions of our father had been well founded—

“Dwell not upon this frightful topic, my beloved Nisida!” exclaimed Francisco, perceiving that she was again becoming dreadfully excited,—for her eyes dilated and glared wildly—her bosom heaved in awful convulsions—and she tossed her arms frantically about.

“No: I will not—I dare not pause to ponder thereon,” she said, falling back upon the pillow, and pressing her hands to that proud and haughty brow behind which the active, racking brain appeared on fire.

“Tranquillize yourself, dearest sister, murmured Flora, bending over the couch and pressing her lips on Nisida’s burning cheek.

“I will—I will, my Flora, whom I now love as much as I once hated!” exclaimed the dying lady. “But let me make an end of my explanations. You already know that our dear mother was gaged when she was compelled to witness the horrible deed enacted in the subterranean charnel-house by the dim light of a sickly lamp; but even had she not been, no word would have issued from her lips—as the manuscript justly observes. During her illness, however, she besought an interview with her husband, for the purpose of proving to him her complete innocence by revealing the fact that his victim was her own brother! But he refused all the entreaties proffered with that object; and our unfortunate mother was forced to contemplate the approach of death with the sad conviction that she should pass away without the satisfaction of establishing her guiltlessness in the eyes of our father. Then was it that she revealed everything to me—to me alone—to me, a young girl of only fifteen when those astounding facts were breathed into my ears. I listened with horror—and I began to hate my father; for I adored my mother! She implored me not to give way to any intemperate language or burst of passion which might induce the inmates of the mansion to suspect that I was the depository of some terrible secret. ‘For,’ said our mother, when on her death-bed, ‘if I have ventured to shock your young mind by so appalling a revelation, it is only that you may understand wherefore I am about to bind you by a solemn vow to love, protect, and watch over Francisco, as if he were your own child rather than your brother. His father, alas! hates him: this I have observed almost ever since the birth of that dear boy: but it is only by means of the dread occurrence of the other night that I have been able to divine the origin of that dislike and unnatural loathing. Your father, Nisida, confided my mother, ‘believes that I have been unfaithful, and suspects that Francisco is the offspring of a guilty amour. With this terrible impression upon his mind, he may persecute my poor boy—he may disinherit him—he may even seek to rid him of life. Kneel, then, by my bed-side, Nisida, and kneel by all you deem sacred—by the love you bear me—and by your hopes of salvation, that you will watch unwearyingly and unceasingly over the welfare and the interests of Francisco—that you will make any sacrifice, incur any danger, or undergo any privation to save him from the effects of his father’s hate—that you will exert all possible means to cause the title and fortune of his father to descend to him, and that you will in no case consent to supplant him in those respects—and lastly, that you will keep secret the dread history of my brother’s fate and your knowledge of your father’s crime.’—To all these conditions of the vow I solemnly and sacredly pledged myself, calling heaven to witness the oath. But I said to our mother, ‘My father will not for ever remain locked up in his own apartment: he will come forth sooner or later, and I must have an opportunity of speaking to him. May I not justify you, my dear mother, in his eyes? may I not assure him that Eugenio was your own brother? He will then cease to hate Francisco, and may even love him as much as he loves me; and you need then have no fears on his account.’—‘Alas! the plan which you suggest may not be put into execution,’ replied our dying mother; ‘for were your father to be aware that I had revealed the occurrences of that dread night to you, Nisida, he would feel that he must be ever looked upon as a murderer, by his own child! Moreover, such appears to be the sad and be-

nighted state of his mind, that he might peradventure deem the tale relative to Eugenio a mere excuse and vile subterfuge. No: I must perish disgraced in his eyes unless he should accord *ere I die*, the interview which yourself and the good Dr. Duras here so vainly implored him to grant me.—Our dear mother then proceeded to give me other instructions, Francisco, relative to yourself; but these,” added Nisida, glancing towards Flora, “it would now be painful to unfold. And yet,” she continued hastily, as a second thought struck her, “it is impossible, my sweet Flora, that you can be weak-minded—for you have this day seen and heard enough to test your mental powers to the extreme possibility of their endurance. Moreover, I feel that my conduct towards you requires a complete justification; and that justification will be found in the last instructions which I received from the lips of my mother!”

“Dearest Nisida,” said the young Countess, “no justification is needed—no apology is required in reference to that subject: for your kind words—your altered manner towards me now—your recognition of me as a sister, made so by my union with your brother,—all this would efface from my mind wrongs ten thousand times more terrible than any injury which I have sustained at your hands. But,” continued Flora, in a slow and gentle tone, “if you wish to explain the nature of those instructions which you received from the lips of your dying parent, let not my presence embarrass you.”

“Yes—I do wish to render my explanation as complete as possible, dearest Flora,” replied Nisida; “for if I have acted severely towards you, it was not to gratify any natural love of cruelty nor any mean jealousy or spite;—on the contrary, the motives were engendered by that impetuous necessity which has swayed my conduct, modelled my disposition, and regulated my mind, ever since that fatal day when I knelt by my mother’s death-bed and swore to obey her last words! For thus did she speak, Flora—these were her instructions, Francisco:—‘Nisida, there is one more subject relative to which I must advise you, and in respect to which you must swear to obey me. My own life furnishes a sad and terrible lesson of the impropriety and folly of contracting an unequal marriage. All my woes—all my sorrows—all the dreadful events which have occurred may be traced to the one grand fact that the Count of Riverola espoused a person of whose family he was ashamed. Nisida,’ she continued, her voice becoming fainter and fainter, ‘watch you narrowly and closely over the welfare of Francisco in this respect. Let him not marry beneath him: let him not unite himself to one whose family contains a single member deserving of obloquy or reproach. Above all, see that he marries not until he shall have reached an age when he may be capable of examining his own heart through the medium of experienced and matured judgment. If you see him form a boyish attachment of which you have good and sufficient reason to disapprove, exert yourself to wean him from it: hesitate not to thwart him:—be not moved by the sorrow he may manifest at the moment;—you will be acting for his welfare—and the time will speedily come when he will rejoice that you have rescued him from the danger of contracting a hasty, rash, and ill-assorted marriage.’ Those were the last instructions of our mother, Francisco; and I swore to obey them. Hence my sorrow, my fears, and my anger when I became aware of the attachment subsisting between yourself, dear brother, and you, my sweet Flora;—and that sorrow was enhanced—those fears were augmented—that anger was increased, Flora, when I learnt that your brother, Alessandro, had renounced the creed of the true God, and that your family thereby contained a member deserving of obloquy and reproach. But that sorrow, those fears, and that anger have now departed from my soul: I recognise the finger of heaven—the will of the Almighty, in the accomplishment of your union, despite of all my projects—all my intrigues to prevent it;—I am satisfied, moreover, that there is in this alliance a fitness and a propriety which will ensure your happiness;—and may the spirit of my sainted mother look down from the empyrean palace where she dwells, and bless you both, even as I now implore the divine mercy to shed its bounties and diffuse its protecting influence around you!”

Nisida had raised herself up to a sitting posture as she uttered this invocation so sublimely interesting and solemnly sincere; and the youthful pair, simultaneously yielding to the same impulse, sank upon their knees to receive the blessings of one who had never bestowed a blessing on mortal being until then! She extended her hands above those two beautiful, bending heads; and her voice as she adjured heaven to protect them, was

plaintively earnest and tremulously clear—and its musical sound seemed to touch the finest chords of sympathy, devotion, and love that vibrated in the hearts of that youthful noble and his virgin-bride!

When this solemn ceremony was accomplished, an immense weight appeared to have been removed from the soul of Lady Nisida of Riverola; and her countenance wore a calm and sweet expression, which formed a happy contrast with the sovereign hauteur and proud contempt that were wont to mark it.

"I have now but little more to say in explanation of my past conduct," she resumed after a long pause. "You can readily divine wherefore I affected the loss of those most glorious faculties which God has given us. I became enthusiastic in my resolve to carry out the injunctions of my dear and much loved mother; and while I lay upon a bed of sickness—a severe illness produced by anguish and horror at all I had heard from her lips, and by her death so premature and sad—I pondered a thousand schemes the object of which was to accomplish the great aims I had in view. I foresaw that I—a weak woman—then, indeed, a mere girl of fifteen—should have to constitute myself the protectress of a brother who was hated by his own father; and I feared lest that hatred should drive him to the adoption of some dreadful plot to rid himself of your presence, Francisco—perhaps even to deprive you of life. I knew that I must watch all his movements and listen to all his conversations with those unprincipled wretches who are ever ready to do the bidding of the powerful and the wealthy. But how was all this to be accomplished?—how could I remain constantly on the alert?—how was I to become a watcher and a listener—a spy ever active, and an eaves-dropper ever awake—without exciting suspicions which would lead to the frustration of my designs, and perhaps involve both myself and my brother in ruin! Then was it that an idea struck me like a flash of lightning—and as a flash of lightning was it terrible and appalling, when breaking on the dark chaos of my thoughts. At first I shrank from it—recoiled from it in horror and dismay—but the more I considered it—the longer I looked that idea in the face—the more I contemplated it, the less formidable did it seem. I have already said that I was enthusiastic and devoted in my resolves to carry out the dying injunctions of my mother;—and thus by degrees I learnt to reflect upon the awful sacrifice which had suggested itself to my imagination, as a species of holy and necessary self-martyrdom. I foresaw that if I affected the loss of hearing and speech, I should obtain all the advantages I sought and all the means I required to enable me to act as the protectress of my brother against the hatred of my father. I believed also that I should not only be considered as unfit to be made the heiress of the title and fortune of the Riverola family, but that our father, Francisco, would see the absolute necessity of treating you in all respects as his lawful and legitimate son, in spite of any suspicions which he might entertain relative to your birth. There were many other motives which influenced me, and which arose out of the injunctions of our mother,—motives which one can well understand, and which I need not detail. Thus was it that, subduing the grief which the idea of making so tremendous a sacrifice excited, on the one hand—and arming myself with the exultation of a martyr, on the other,—thus was it that I resolved to simulate the character of the Deaf and Dumb. It was however necessary to obtain the collusion of Dr. Duras; and this aim I carried after many hours of argument and persuasion. He was then ignorant—and still is ignorant—of the real motives which prompted me to this self-martyrdom: but I led him to believe that the gravest and most important family interests required that moral immolation of my own happiness;—and I vowed that unless he would consent to aid me, it was my firm resolve to shut myself up in a convent and take the veil. This threat, which I had not the least design of carrying into effect, induced him to yield a reluctant acquiescence with my project; for he loved me as if I had been his child. He was moreover consoled somewhat by the assurance which I gave him, and in which I myself felt implicit confidence at the time, that the necessity for the simulation of deafness and dumbness on my part would cease the moment my father should be no more. In a word, the good—the kind Dr. Duras promised to act in accordance with my wishes; and I accordingly became NISIDA THE DEAF AND DUMB!"

"Merciful heavens! and that immense—and immeasurable sacrifice was made for me!" cried Francisco, throwing himself into the arms of his sister, and imprinting a thousand kisses on her cheeks.

"Yes—for your sake, and in order to carry out the dying commands of our mother, the sainted Vitangelo!" responded Nisida. "I shall not weary you with a description of the feelings and emotions with which I commenced that long career of duplicity; by the very success that attended the part which I had undertaken to perform, you may estimate the magnitude and the extent of the exertions which it cost me thus to maintain myself a living—a constant—and yet undetected lie! Ten years passed away—ten years, marked by many incidents which made me rejoice, for your sake, Francisco, that I had accepted the self-martyrdom which circumstances had suggested to me. At length our father lay upon his death-bed: and then—Oh! then, I rejoiced, yes, rejoiced, though he was dying;—for I thought that the end of my career of duplicity was at hand. Judge, then, of my astonishment—my grief—my despair, when I heard the last injunctions which our father addressed to you, Francisco, on that bed of death. What could the mystery of that closet mean? Of that I then knew nothing. Wherefore was I to remain in complete ignorance of the instructions thus given to you? And what was signified by the words relative to the disposal of our father's property? For you may remember that he spoke thus, addressing himself of course to you:—*'You will find that I have left the whole of my property to you. At the same time my will specifies certain conditions relative to your sister Nisida, for whom I have made due provision only in the case—which is, alas! almost in defiance of every hope, of her recovery from that dreadful affliction which renders her so completely dependant on your kindness.'* These ominous and mysterious words that I had formed relative to the certainty of your being left the sole and unconditional heir alike to title and estate. I therefore resolved to maintain the character of the Deaf and Dumb until I should have fathomed the secrets of the closet, and have become acquainted with the conditions of the will. Oh! well do I remember the glance which the generous-hearted Duras cast towards me, when, returning to the chamber, he inquired by means of that significant look whether the words of our dying father were prognostic of hope for me—whether, indeed, the necessity of sustaining the dreadful duplicity would cease when he should be no more. And I remember also, that the look and the sign by which I conveyed a negative answer was expressive of the deep melancholy that filled my soul."

"Alas! my dear—my self-sacrificed sister!" murmured Francisco, tears trickling down his cheeks.

"Yes—my disappointment was cruel indeed," continued Nisida. "But the excitement of the scenes and incidents which followed rapidly the death of our father, restored my mind to its wonted tone of fortitude—vigour—and proud determination. That very night, Francisco, I took the key of the cabinet for your garments, while you slept—I sped to the chamber of death—I visited the depository of horrible mysteries—and for the first time I became aware that the two skeletons were contained in that closet! And whose fleshless relics they were, the dreadful manuscript speedily revealed to me! Then was it also for the first time that I learnt how Margaretha was the detestable spy whose agency had led to such a frightful catastrophe in respect to Eugenio and Vitangelo;—then became I aware that our mother's corpse slept not in the vault to which a coffin had been consigned;—in a word, the full measure of our sire's atrocity—O God! that I should be compelled thus to speak—was revealed to me! But on Margaretha have I been avenged," added Nisida, in a low tone, and with a convulsive shudder, produced by the recollection of that terrible night when she immolated the miserable old woman above the grave where lay a portion of the remains of her mother and of Eugenio.

"You have been avenged on Margaretha, sister?" ejaculated Francisco, surveying Nisida with apprehension.

"Yes," she replied, her large black eyes flashing with a scintillation of their former fires: "that woman—I have slain her! But, start not, Flora—look not reproachfully upon me, Francisco: 'twas a deed fully justified—a vengeance righteously exercised—a penalty well deserved! And now let me hasten to bring my long and tedious explanations to a conclusion—for they have occupied a longer space than I had at first anticipated, and I am weak and faint! Little, however, remains to be told. The nature of our father's will compelled me to persist in my self-martyrdom; for I had sworn to my dying mother not to accept any conditions or advan-

tages which could have the effect of disinheriting you, Francisco!"

"Oh! what a deep debt of gratitude do I owe thee, my beloved sister!" exclaimed the young Count, powerfully affected by the generous sacrifices made by Nisida on his behalf.

"And think you that I have experienced no reward?" asked the lady in a sweet tone, and with a placid smile: "do you imagine that the consciousness of having devoted myself to the fulfilment of my adored mother's wishes, has been no recompense? Yes—I have had my consolations and my hours of happiness, as well as my sufferings and periods of profound affliction. But I feel a soft and heavenly repose stealing over me—'tis a sweet sleep—and yet it is not the slumber of death! No, no: 'tis a delicious trance into which I am falling—'tis as if a celestial vision—"

She said no more: her eyes closed—she fell back and slept soundly.

"Merciful heavens! my sister is no more," exclaimed Francisco, in terror and despair.

"Fear not, my beloved husband," said Flora; "Nisida sleeps—and 'tis a healthy slumber! The pulsations of her heart are regular—her breath comes freely. Joy—joy, Francisco—she will recover!"

"The Holy Virgin grant that your hopes may be fulfilled!" returned the young Count. "But let us not disturb her. We will sit down by the bedside, Flora,—and watch till she shall awake!"

But scarcely had he uttered these words, when the door of the chamber opened, and an old man of venerable aspect, and with a long beard as white as snow, advanced towards the newly married pair.

Francisco and Flora beheld him with feelings of reverence and awe; for something appeared to tell them that he was a mortal of no common order.

"My dear children," he said, addressing them in a paternal manner—and his voice was firm but mild; "ye need not watch here for the present. Retire—and seek not this chamber again until the morning of to-morrow. Fear nothing, excellent young man—for thou hast borne arms in the cause of the cross—fear nothing, amiable young lady—for thou art attended by guardian angels!"

And as the venerable man thus addressed them severally, he extended his hands to bless them;—and they received that blessing with holy meekness, and yet with a joyous feeling which appeared to be of glorious augury for their future happiness.

Then, obedient to the command of the stranger, they slowly quitted the apartment—urged to yield to his will by a secret influence which they could not resist, but which nevertheless animated them with a pious confidence in the integrity of his purpose.

The door closed behind them:—and Christian Rosen-orux remained in the room with the dead Wagner and the dying Nisida.

## CHAPTER LXXVII.

### THE GRAND VIZIER IN FLORENCE.

WHILE the incidents related in the last few chapters were taking place at the Riverola Palace, the Council of State had assembled to receive the Grand Vizier—the mighty Ibrahim—who had signified his intention of meeting that august body at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Accordingly, so soon as he had witnessed the marriage ceremony which united his sister to the Count of Riverola, he returned from Wagner's mansion to his own pavilion in the midst of the Ottoman encampment. There he arrayed himself in a manner becoming his exalted rank; and mounting his splendidly caparisoned steed, he repaired with a brilliant escort to the ducal palace.

The streets of the city of Florence were thronged with multitudes anxious to gain a sight of the representative of the Sultan,—a view of the man whose will and pleasure swayed the greatest empire in existence at that period of the world's age!

And as Ibrahim passed through those avenues so well known to him—threading those thoroughfares each feature of which was so indelibly impressed upon his memory—and beheld many, many familiar spots, all of which awakened in his mind reminiscences of a happy childhood, and of years gone by,—when too he reflected that he had quitted Florence, poor, obscure, and unmarked amidst the millions of his fellow-men—and that now as he entered the beauteous city, multitudes came forth to gaze upon him, as on one invested with a high

rank, and enjoying a power mighty to do much—when he thought of all this, his bosom swelled with mingled emotions of pride and tenderness, regret and joy: and while tears trembled upon his long black lashes, a smile of haughty triumph played on his lips.

On—the procession goes, through the crowded streets and across the spacious squares—watched by the eyes of transcendent beauty and proud aristocracy from the balconies of palaces and the casements of lordly mansions,—on—amidst a wondering and admiring populace, grateful, too, that so mighty a chief as Ibrahim should have spared their city from sack and ruin!

At length the Grand Vizier, attended by the great Beglerbegs and Pachas of his army, entered the square of the ducal palace; and as his prancing steed bore him proudly beneath the massive arch, the roar of artillery announced to the City of Flowers that the Ottoman Minister was now within the precincts of the dwelling of the Florentine sovereign.

The Duke and the Members of the Council of State were all assembled in the court of the Palazzo to receive the illustrious visitor, who, having dismounted, from his horse, accompanied the Prince and those high dignitaries to the Council-Chamber.

When the personages thus assembled had taken their seats around the spacious table, covered with a rich red velvet cloth, the Grand Vizier proceeded to address the Duke and the councillors.

"High and mighty Prince, and noble and puissant Lords," he said, in the tone of one conscious of his power, "I am well satisfied with the manner in which my demands have been fulfilled up to this moment. Two ladies, in whom I feel a deep and sincere interest, and who were most unjustly imprisoned to suit the vindictive purposes of the Count of Arestino, have been delivered up to me; and ye have likewise agreed to make full and adequate atonement for the part which Florence enacted in the late contest between the Christians and Mussulmans in the Island of Rhodes. I have therefore determined to reduce my demands upon the Republic, for indemnity and compensation, to as low a figure as my own dignity and sense of that duty which I owe to my sovereign (whom God preserve many days!) will permit. The sum that I now require from your treasury, mighty Prince and puissant lords, is a hundred thousand pistoles;\* and in addition thereto, I claim peculiar privileges for Ottoman vessels trading to Leghorn—a guarantee of peace on the part of the Republic for three years—and the release of such prisoners now in the dungeons in the Inquisition, whom it may seem good to me thus to mark out as deserving of your mercy.

"A hundred thousand pistoles, my lord, would completely exhaust the treasury of the Republic," said the Duke, with dismay pictured upon his countenance.

"Think you," cried the Grand Vizier angrily, "that I shall dare to face my imperial master, on my return to Constantinople, unless I be able to place at his feet a sum adequate to meet the expenses incurred by this expedition of a great fleet and a powerful army?"

"Your Highness will at least accord us a few days wherein to obtain the amount required," said the Duke; "for it will be necessary to levy a tax upon the Republic."

"I grant you until sunset, my lord—until sunset this evening," added the Grand Vizier, speaking with stern emphasis. And if you will permit me to tender my advice, you will at once command the Grand Inquisitor and the Count of Arestino to furnish the sum required; for the former, I am inclined to suspect, is a most unjust judge—and the latter, I am well convinced, is a most cruel and revengeful noble."

"The Count of Arestino is no more, your Highness," answered the Duke. "The Marquis of Orsini murdered him before the very eyes of the Grand Inquisitor, and will therefore head the procession of victims at the approaching auto-da-fé."

"By the footstool of Allah! that shall not be," exclaimed Ibrahim. "The machinations of the Count of Arestino threw into the Inquisition dungeons those two ladies whom ye delivered up to me last night; and it was my intention when I spoke of releasing certain prisoners ere now, to stipulate for the freedom of those whom the vengeance of that Count had immured in your accursed prison-house. See then, my lords, that all those of whom I speak be forthwith brought hither into our presence."

It may be proper to inform the reader that Flora had

\* 350,000, in English money—an immense sum at that period.

solicited her brother to save the Marquis of Orsini and the Countess Giulia, to whom the young wife of Francisco had been indebted for her escape from the Carmelite Convent; for, as the secrets of the Torture Chamber were never suffered to transpire, she was of course ignorant of the death of the guilty Giulia and of the assassination of the Count of Arestino by the Marquis of Orsini.

At the command of Ibrahim-Pacha, who spoke in a firm and resolute manner, the Duke summoned a sentinel from the corridor adjoining the Council-chamber, and issued the necessary orders to fulfil the desire of the Grand Vizier.

Nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed, during which one of the councillors drew up the guarantee of peace and of the commercial privileges demanded by Ibrahim.

At length the door opened and several Familiars made their appearance, leading in Manuel d'Orsini and Isaac ben Solomon, both heavily chained.

The former walked with head erect, and proud bearing; the latter could scarcely drag his wasted, racked, and tottering limbs along, and was compelled to hang upon the arms of the Familiars for support. Nevertheless, there was something so meek—so patient—and so resigned in the expression of the old and persecuted Israelite's countenance, that Ibrahim-Pacha's soul was touched with a sentiment of pity in his behalf.

"But these are not all the prisoners," exclaimed the Grand Vizier, turning angrily towards the Duke: "where is the Countess Giulia of Arestino?"

"My lord, she is no more," answered the Prince.

"And heaven be thanked that she is indeed no more!" cried Manuel d'Orsini, in a tone of mingled rage and bitterness. "Fortunate is it for her that Death has snatched her away from the grasp of miscreants in human shape, and who call themselves Christians. My lord," he continued, turning towards Ibrahim,—"I know not who you are—but I perceive by your garb that you are a Moslem, and I imagine that your rank is high by the title addressed to you by the Duke—"

"Presume not thus to intrude your observations on his Highness, the Grand Vizier!" exclaimed one of the councillors in a severe tone.

"On the contrary," said Ibrahim-Pacha, "let him speak—and without reserve. My lord of Orsini, fear not—I will protect you!"

"The remark I was about to make, illustrious Vizier," cried Manuel, "is brief, though it may prove not palatable to the patrons of the Inquisition and the supporters of that awful engine of despotism and cruelty," he added, glancing fiercely at the Duke and the assembled councillors. "I was anxious to observe that the Christian Church has founded and maintained that abhorrent institution; and that there is more true mercy—more genuine sympathy—and more of the holy spirit of forgiveness in the breast of this reviled, despised, and persecuted Jew, than in the bosoms of all the miserable hypocrites who have dared to sanction the infernal tortures which have been inflicted upon him. For myself I would not accept mercy at their hands; and I would rather go in the companionship of this Jew to the funeral pile, than remain alive to dwell amongst a race of incarnate fiends, calling themselves Christians."

"This insolence is not to be borne!" exclaimed the Duke, starting from his seat, his countenance glowing with indignation.

"Your Highness and all the councillors now assembled, well merit the reproaches of the Marquis of Orsini," said the Grand Vizier, sternly. "But it is for me to command here—and for you to obey, proud Prince. Let the chains be removed from those prisoners forthwith."

The Duke sank back into his chair; and, subduing his rage as well as he was able, he made a sign to the Familiars to set the Jew and the Marquis at liberty.

"Great Vizier," exclaimed Manuel, "the life and the liberty which, at your all-powerful nod, are restored to me, will prove irksome and valueless if I be compelled to remain in a Christian land. Confer not favours by halves, my lord—render me completely grateful to you! Take me into your service—even as a slave, if your Highness will; but let me accompany to a Mussulman country a Mussulman who can teach the Christians such a fine lesson of mercy and forgiveness."

"You shall go with me to Constantinople, Manuel—but not as a slave," returned Ibrahim, profoundly touched by the sincere tone and earnest manner of the young noble: "no—you shall accompany me as a friend."

"A thousand thanks, great Vizier, for this kindness—

this generosity!" said the Marquis, deeply affected; then, as a sudden idea struck him, he turned towards the Jew, exclaiming, "But we must not leave this old man here behind us. 'Twere the same as if we were to abandon a helpless child in the midst of a forest inhabited by ferocious wolves."

"Yes—yes—let me accompany you, excellent young man!" murmured Isaac, clinging to the arm of the Marquis—for their chains were now knocked off. "You were the first Christian who ever spoke kindly to me; and I have no kith—no kindred on the face of the earth. I am a lone—desolate old man; but I have wealth—much wealth, Manuel did Orsini—and all that I have shall be thine."

"The Jew shall accompany us, my lord," said Ibrahim, addressing himself to the Marquis; then, turning towards the Duke, he exclaimed, in a severe tone, "But a few hours remain until sunset, and the ransom of a hundred thousand pistoles must be paid to me; or I will deliver up this proud palace and the homes of all the councillors now assembled, to the pillage of my troops."

"Nay—nay, my lord!" cried the Jew, horror-struck at the threat; "bring not the terrors of sack, and storm, and carnage into this fair city! A hundred thousand pistoles, your Highness says—a hundred thousand pistoles," he added, in a slower and more musing tone: "'tis a large sum—a very large sum! And yet—to save so many men, and their innocent families, from ruin—from desolation—Yes—yes, my lord," he exclaimed, hastily interrupting himself,—"I—I will pay you the ransom-money!"

"No—by Allah!" ejaculated Ibrahim: "not a single pistole shall be thus extorted from thee! Sooner shall the Florentine Treasury grant thee an indemnification for the horrible tortures which thou hast endured, than thy wealth be poured forth to furnish this ransom-money. Come, my lord of Orsini—come, worthy Jew," continued the Grand Vizier, rising from his seat; "we will depart to the Ottoman encampment."

"Patience, your Highness, for a few hours," urged the Duke; "and the hundred thousand pistoles shall be counted down before thee."

"This poor old man," answered the Grand Vizier, indicating the Jew with a rapid glance, "has been so racked and tortured in your accused prison-house, that he cannot be too speedily placed under the care of my own chirurgeon. For this reason I depart at once: see thou that the ransom be despatched to my pavilion ere the sun shall have set behind the western hills."

With these words the Grand Vizier bowed haughtily to the Duke, and quitted the Council-Chamber. Manuel of Orsini followed, supporting Isaac ben Solomon; and, on reaching the court, one of Ibrahim's slaves took the Jew up behind him on his steed. The Marquis was provided with a horse; and the cavalcade moved rapidly away from the precincts of the ducal palace.

Profiting by the hint which Ibrahim-Pacha had offered them, the Duke and the councillors instantaneously levied a heavy fine upon the Grand Inquisitor; and the remainder of the money required to make up the amount demanded, was furnished from the public treasury.

Thus by the hour of sunset the ransom was paid.

At an early hour on the ensuing morning, Francisco di Riverola and his beautiful, blushing bride quitted the chamber where they had passed the night in each other's arms, and repaired to the apartment where so many terrible mysteries had been revealed to them and so many dreadful incidents had occurred on the preceding day.

Hand in hand they traversed the passages and the corridors leading to that room in which they had left Christian Rosenkrux with the dead Wagner and the dying Nisida: hand in hand and silently they went—that fine young noble, and that charming bride!

On reaching the door of the chamber, Francisco looked gently; and the glance of intelligence which passed between himself and Flora showed that each was a prey to the same breathless suspense—the same mingled feelings of bright hopes and vague fears.

In a few moments the door was slowly opened; and the venerable old man appeared, his countenance wearing a solemn and mournful aspect.

Then Francisco and the young Countess knew that all was over; and tears started into their eyes.

Christian Rosenkrux beckoned them to advance towards the bed, around which the curtains were drawn close; and as they entered the room, the rapid and simultaneous glances which they cast towards the spot where Fernand



Wagner fell down and surrendered up his breath, showed them that the corpse had been removed.

Approaching the bed, with slow and measured steps, Rosenorux drew aside the drapery; and for a moment Francisco and Flora shrank back from the spectacle which met their view—but at the next instant they advanced to the couch, and contemplated with mournful attention the scene presented to them.

For there—upon that couch,—side by side, lay Fernand Wagner and Nisida of Riverola—stiff, motionless, cold.

"Grieve not for her loss, my children," said Christian Rosenorux: "she has gone to a happier realm—for the sinner; repentance which she manifested in her last hours has atoned for all the evils she wrought in her life-time. From the moment, young lady, when she banished from her soul the rancour long harboured there against thee—from the instant that she received thee in her arms, and called thee sister—the blessing of heaven was vouchsafed unto her. She was penitent—very penitent, while I administered to her the consolations of religion; and a complete change came over her mind. Grieve not, then, for her: happy on earth she never could have been again—but happy in heaven she doubtless now is!"

Francisco and the young Countess knelt by the side of the couch, and prayed for a long time in silence, with their faces buried in their hands.

When they again raised their heads, and glanced around, the venerable old man no longer met their eyes.

Christian Rosenorux had departed unperceived, leaving Francisco and Flora in complete ignorance of his name; but they experienced a secret conviction that he was something more than an ordinary mortal; and the remembrance of the blessing which he had bestowed upon them on the preceding day shed a soothing and holy influence over their minds.

### CONCLUSION.

LITTLE now remains to be said: a few brief observations and a rapid glance at the eventual fortunes and fates of the leading characters in the tale will acquit us of our task.

Nisida and Wagner were entombed in the same vault; and their names were inscribed upon the same mural tablet. The funeral was conducted with the utmost privacy—and the mourners were few, but their grief was sincere. And amongst them was Dr. Duras, who had loved Nisida as if she had been his own child!

On the night following the one on which those obsequies took place, another funeral procession departed from the Riverola Palace to the adjacent church; and two coffins were on this occasion, as on the former, consigned to the family tomb. But the ceremony was conducted with even more privacy than the first; and one mourner alone was present. This was Francisco himself; and thus did he perform the duty of interring in sacred ground the remains of his ill-fated mother Vitan-gela and her brother Eugenio.

The manuscript of the late Count of Riverola was burnt: the closet which had so long contained such fearful mysteries was walled up; and the chamber where so many dreadful incidents had occurred, was never used during the lifetime of Francisco and Flora.

The Grand Vizier remained with his army a few days beneath the walls of Florence; and during that time Isaacar ben Solomon so far recovered his health and strength, under the skilful care of an Egyptian physician, as to be able to visit his dwelling in the suburb of Alla Croce, and secure the immense wealth which he had amassed during a long life of activity and financia prosperity.

When the day of the Grand Vizier's departure arrived, he took a tender farewell of his sister Flora and his aunt, both of whom he loaded with the most costly presents; and in return, he received from Francisco a gift of several horses of rare breed and immense value. Nor did this species of interchange of proofs of attachment end here: for every year, until Ibrahim's death, did that great Minister and the Count of Riverola forward to each other letters and rich presents, thus maintain- ing

the end that friendship which had commenced in the Island of Rhodes, and which was cemented by the marriage of Francisco and Flora.

Isaacar ben Solomon and Manuel d'Orsini accompanied the Grand Vizier to Constantinople, and were treated by him with every mark of distinction. But the Jew never completely recovered the tortures which he had endured in the prison of the Inquisition, and in less than two years from the date of his release, he died in the arms of the Marquis, to whom he left the whole of his immense fortune. Manuel d'Orsini abjured Christianity, and entered the Ottoman service, in which his success was brilliant and his rise rapid, thanks to the favour of the Grand Vizier. The reader of Ottoman history will find the name of Mustapha-Pacha frequently mentioned with honour in the reign of Solymann the Magnificent;—and Mustapha-Pacha, Beglerbeg of the mighty province of Anatolia, was once Manuel d'Orsini.

For nearly sixteen years did Ibrahim-Pacha govern the Ottoman realms in the name of the Sultan:—for nearly sixteen years did he hold the imperial seals which had been entrusted to him at a period when the colossal power of the Empire seemed tottering to its fall. During that interval he raised the Ottoman name to the highest pinnacle of glory—extended the dominions of his master—and shook the proudest thrones in Christendom to their foundation. Ferdinand, King of Hungary, called him "brother," and the Emperor Charles the Fifth of Germany, styled him "cousin" in the epistolary communications which passed between them. But a Greek, who had long—long cherished a deadly hatred against the puissant Grand Vizier, at last contrived to enter the service of the Sultan in the guise of a slave; and this man, succeeding in gaining that monarch's ear, whispered mysterious warnings against the ambition of Ibrahim. Solymann became alarmed; and, opening his eyes to the real position of affairs, perceived that the Vizier was indeed far more powerful than himself.

This was enough to ensure the immediate destruction of a Turkish Minister.

Accordingly, one evening Ibrahim was invited to dine with the Sultan, and to sleep at the imperial palace. Never had Solymann appeared more attached to his favourite than on this occasion; and Ibrahim retired to the chamber prepared for him, with a heart elated by the caresses bestowed upon him by his imperial master.

But in the dead of night he was awakened by the entrance of several persons into the room; and, starting up in terror, the Grand Vizier beheld four black slaves, headed by a Greek, creep snake-like towards his couch. And that Greek's countenance, sinister and menacing, was immediately recognised by the affrighted Ibrahim—though more than fifteen years had elapsed since he had last set eyes upon those features!

Short and ineffectual was the struggle against the messengers of death: the accursed bow-string encircled the neck of the unhappy Ibrahim;—and at the moment when the vindictive Greek drew tight the fatal noose, the last words which hissed in the ears of the Grand Vizier were—"The wrongs of Calanthe are avenged!"

Thus perished the most powerful Minister that ever held the imperial seals of Ottoman domination;—and the long pent-up but never subdued vindictive feelings of Demetrius were assuaged at length!

Dame Francatelli had long been numbered with those who were gone to their eternal homes, when the news of the death of Ibrahim-Pacha reached Florence. But the Count and Countess of Riverola shed many, many bitter tears at the sad and untimely fate of the Grand Vizier.

Time, however, smooths down all grief; and happiness again returned to the Riverola Palace. For when Francisco and Flora looked around them, and beheld the smiling progeny which had blessed their union,—when they expressed the sweet solace of each other's sympathy, the outpouring of two hearts which beat as one, ever in union, and filled with a mutual love which time impaired not,—then they remembered that it was useless and wrong to repine against the decrees of Providence; and, in this trusting faith in heaven, and in the enjoyment of each other's unwearied affection, they lived to a good old age—dying at length in the arms of their children.

